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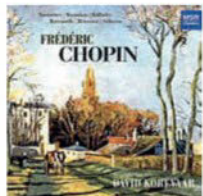
A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Chopin

Ballades – No 1, Op 23; No 3, Op 47. Barcarolle, Op 60. Berceuse, Op 57. Mazurkas – No 30, Op 50 No 1; No 31, Op 50 No 2; No 32, Op 50 No 3. Nocturnes – No 5, Op 15 No 2; No 8, Op 27 No 2; No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 16, Op 55 No 2. Scherzo No 4, Op 54

David Korevaar *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1626 (77' • DDD)



Given David Korevaar's penchant for putting together interesting and

cohesive concert programmes, it's not surprising that his all-Chopin disc embraces many moods and styles. Indeed, Korevaar's first selection, the C minor Nocturne, Op 48 No 1, runs the emotional gamut between its stark *mezza voce* opening and the middle section's tumultuous octave outbursts, helped by the pianist's full-bodied sonority and huge dynamic range. The contrapuntal textures of the E flat Nocturne, Op 55 No 2, don't float in the Friedman/Moravec/Rubinstein manner but are rather closer to Arrau's combative probity.

The A flat (Third) Ballade's filigree never sprints faster than it could be comfortably sung, and consistently holds attention, while the D flat Nocturne, Op 27 No 2, is spacious and cannily proportioned. Since Chopin's Mazurkas lend themselves to a wide interpretative berth, the three Op 50 selections easily absorb Korevaar's subjective breadth and harmonic pointing. By contrast, the meticulously detailed Barcarolle and Berceuse fall somewhat short of the lilt and poetic tenderness distinguishing Murray Perahia's classic recordings. The Fourth Scherzo's outer sections are supple and poised, yet don't quite take rhythmic wing.

Korevaar sheds fresh and often unconventional light on the G minor (First) Ballade. The opening theme's myriad repetitions markedly differ, yet are inevitably unified, while the pianist brings uncommon melodic clarity to the rapid fioritura and heroic virtuoso patterns. Inner voices (both real and implied) bubble up from the left-hand accompaniments, and transitions

GRAMOPHONE *talks to...*

Stephanie Sant'Ambrogio

The violinist and viola player talks about her latest recording, 'Soaring Solo'

What inspired such a varied programme?

I am particularly drawn to the intimacy and purity of solo string repertoire. I also love championing music by living composers and female composers, as well as 'forgotten' or lesser-known works; I wanted to include as many of these gems as I could, so I chose mostly short pieces that are close to my heart.

What are the advantages, and the challenges, of playing both instruments?

I picked up the viola for the first time when I started teaching at the University of Nevada, Reno, in 2007. Since there was no viola instructor on the faculty, I accepted the challenge. The darker timbre of the instrument resonates with me, perhaps because I grew up in a family of cellists. And practising the viola benefits my violin-playing, and vice versa. The viola is far more difficult to play in tune, which might be the reason violinists have so many viola jokes!



Playing without accompaniment must bring its own difficulties.

Composers create the effect of an accompaniment in two main ways: the use of multiple stops, and by combining bowing with simultaneous left-hand pizzicato. These two techniques are somewhat challenging to execute, but create the harmony and the fuller sound vital to solo performance.

What's next?

As Artistic Director of Cactus Pear Music Festival in San Antonio, Texas, I've organised a recording of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts, coupled with works by Ned Rorem and James Scott Balentine.

between sections are assiduously gauged. This revelatory interpretation alone is worth the disc's price. **Jed Distler**

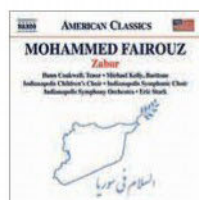
Fairouz

Zabur

Dann Coakwell *ten* Michael Kelly *bar* Indianapolis Children's Choir, Symphonic Choir and Symphony Orchestra / Eric Stark

Naxos American Classics © 8 559803

(56' • DDD • T/t)



No one need question the relevance, alas, of *Zabur*, Mohammed Fairouz's powerful and

affecting oratorio. The subject is war, and the presence of impending death pervades the 56-minute work. Yet *Zabur* – Arabic for 'psalms' – also is a cry for peace, especially in the heartbreaking utterances of the children who are crammed into the Middle Eastern bomb shelter where the piece takes place.

Fairouz's score, set to a libretto by Najla Said, was commissioned by the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir, which gave the world premiere in April 2015 and the New York premiere at Carnegie Hall in October 2016. In its 16 movements, *Zabur* traces the thoughts of a young blogger who has no forum for his writing. As he sets down his impressions of war, the adults and children confined in the shelter with him offer prayers of hope.

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— ROMAN MARKOWICZ - CONCERTONET



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PHOTO: SASHA GUSOV

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Marin Alsop | Jennifer Johnson Cano
Jean-Yves Thibaudet | Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

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There's no denying the wit and vitality that Alsop—a lively entertainer as well as a powerhouse musician—brings to her performances.”

— SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

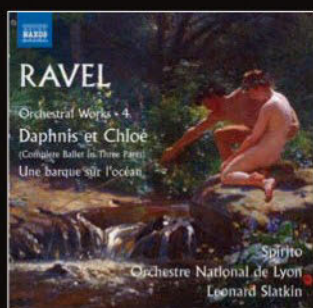


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RAVEL: ORCHESTRAL WORKS, VOLUME 4

Spirito | Orchestre National de Lyon | Leonard Slatkin



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Leonard Slatkin and the Orchestre National de Lyon will perform *Ravel* February 20th, 2017 at Carnegie Hall

PHOTO: CINDY MCTEE

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Theremin-playing Carolina Eyck, with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble

Most of the music Fairouz has poured into *Zabur* is lyrical and warm, with occasional blocks of dissonance – as in the opening choral outburst – to underline the tragic circumstances. The New York-based composer brings soaring emotional involvement to the solo and choral lines, suggesting he would be a natural in the operatic sphere. The orchestral writing is colourful, assured and vivid.

The 2015 world premiere is preserved on this recording, which shows the Indianapolis choir and its colleagues, the Indianapolis Children's Choir and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, in superb, responsive form under Eric Stark. Baritone Michael Kelly sings with eloquent intensity as the blogger, and tenor Dann Coakwell is equally fine as his companion.

Donald Rosenberg

Plog · Reskin · Rokeach

Plog Trumpet Sonata **Reskin** Trumpet Sonata
Rokeach Running at the Top of the World

Paul Futer *tpt* **Susan Nowicki** *pf*

MSR Classics © MS1610 (51' • DDD)



If 'American trumpeter Paul Futer plays three baby-boomer sonatas at Troy Savings Bank'

were the headline, then Anthony Plog's brilliant Sonata in the revised 2010 version

would be the star. After a bracing opening revelling in striking new sound possibilities, Plog proceeds with a *Lento* of phantasmagoric events as the two instruments intertwine and exult in quiet, lyrical tones. An insanely delirious *Molto vivace* sets up an audacious finale of spectacular events under the innocent title *Moderato*: a short introduction, martial noises leading to ecstasy, and a short, quick lick at the end. Fifteen minutes long, commissioned by the University of Texas at Austin School of Music for Ray Sasaki, Plog's Sonata is a masterwork.

Martin Rokeach's *Running at the Top of the World* is something different: dramatic, unpredictable, rich and multi-layered, moving from wild, solitary fantasy through bleak desolation to a miraculous, mellifluous dash towards eternity. Charles Reskin's smooth but less striking Sonata is an affectionate homage to mid-20th-century American classical and jazz styles, with familiar, haunting overtones.

Adding to Futer's commanding, virtuoso playing, pianist Susan Nowicki rises to challenges which are scarcely less formidable, and together they make a persuasive case for rarely heard music of rare quality. Equally complicit is the sound, recorded at the legendary Troy Savings Bank Music Hall in Albany, New York. Both the gleam and textures of Futer's sound are almost tangible, and the distinction between the trumpet and the flugelhorn in the second movement of

Reskin's Sonata is ideal for comparing new hardware. **Laurence Vittes**

'Fantasias for Theremin and String Quartet'

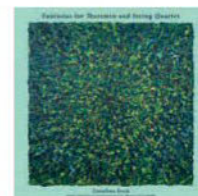
Eyck Oakunur Lynntuja (Strange Birds). Leyohmi (Luminescence). Nukkuva Luohla (Sleepy Dragon). Metsa Happa (Jumping River). Dappa Solarjos (Dappled Sunlight). Nousta/Needad (Ascent/Descent)

Carolina Eyck *theremin*

American Contemporary Music Ensemble

Butterscotch Records © (CD or ●) BSR015

(31' • DDD)



The theremin is best known as the sound of horror, science fiction and anxiety in movies.

But the electronic instrument has also taken a place in the concert field, thanks to musicians such as Carolina Eyck. The German composer and theremin virtuoso appears in both guises on the new recording. It's a short programme – only 31 minutes of music – yet Eyck's creations go far in revealing how striking the theremin can be when placed in haunting and expressive contexts.

The instrument, the brainwave of the Russian inventor Léon Theremin (Lev Termen) in 1920, is unique in that the performer never touches it. By



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The New York-based Meridian Arts Ensemble champion cool 21st-century repertoire

manipulating hands near two antennas, the player produces an array of sounds and effects. As the six miniatures offered here suggest, Eyck has mastered the art of evoking all sorts of phenomena.

Aviary chirps and swoops, for example, fill *Oakunur Lynntuja* ('Strange Birds') – the title of each piece is evidently derived from Scandinavian languages – as produced by the theremin. The instrument achieves an entirely different, shimmering aura in *Leyohmi* ('Luminescence') and even approaches something Fafner-like in *Nukkuva Luobla* ('Sleepy Dragon').

Eyck's compositional style might be described as minimalism-meets-Impressionism, with smidges of mystical elements blended in. The theremin is teamed here with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble, one of whose violinists is the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw. Considering the brevity of this disc, it might have been a good idea to have asked her to contribute a work featuring this most curious of instruments. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Seven Kings'

Ballou for brass quintet and percussion
Grabois *Migration* **E Jacobs** *Passed Time*
Maggio *Revolver* **Sanford** *Seven Kings*
Meridian Arts Ensemble
 Innova © INNOVA943 (76' • DDD)



Since their founding in 1987, the five brass players and one percussionist of the New York-based Meridian Arts Ensemble have championed cool 21st-century repertoire. They have already released eight solo CDs, often with programmatic titles and intent, drawing on Zappa, Bach, King Crimson, Captain Beefheart, Hendrix, Babbitt and Carter, as well as Renaissance and Baroque music, Afro-Cuban dance styles and South American folk music.

You hear these influences throughout their ninth CD, featuring 'music by old friends, all long overdue for release', and all composed within the last 20 years. Recorded with cool, clinical accuracy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, the music all has a similar style, as if six top jazz musicians had wandered into a classical music recording studio and decided to jam.

The centrepiece is Robert Maggio's *Revolver*, which began as a response to Jim Jarmusch's 1995 deep-noir western flick; in five movements Maggio uses haunting expressive means – Mahlerian slinking here, a jazz funeral march there – to capture the movie's pop culture icons including Johnny Depp, Billy Bob Thornton, Iggy Pop,

Crispin Glover, John Hurt, and, in his final film role, Robert Mitchum.

The CD starts with Meridian's horn player Daniel Grabois's *Migration*, with its intriguingly obscure use of a sad Schubert song about love and dying, then migrates to David Sanford's six-movement title-track, a series of striking sound-images and wailing lyric riffs. Dave Ballou's expansive *for brass quintet and percussion* plays with your head with its unpredictable sonic thrills, and Edward Jacobs's *Passed Time* contains the most purely beautiful moments on the disc.

Laurence Vittes

'Soaring Solo'

Águila Cortando limones **Bacewicz** Polish Caprice **Biber** Passacaglia **Bunch** Sarabande **Hindemith** Solo Violin Sonata, Op 31 No 2 **Hovhaness** Chahagir^a **Mamluk** From My Garden **Rolla** Capriccio No 1^a **Say** Cleopatra **Schnittke** Fuga **Telemann** Fantasie No 10 **Toch** Three Impromptus, Op 90^a
Stephanie Sant'Ambrogio *vn^a/va*
 MSR Classics © MS1627 (74' • DDD)



On her new CD of encores and other pieces that, with the exception of Heinrich Biber's Passacaglia in G minor, rarely stray

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Christmas Delights – Music to bring a smile to your Holiday Season.

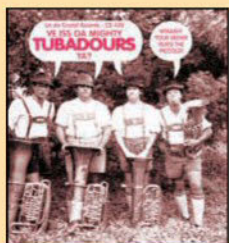


CD873: Wanted! The Bassoon Brothers. "Just plain hilarious" (Seattle Times). Funeral March of a Marionette, Alexander's Ragtime Band, Weber Fantasy, Hall of the Mountain King, Bugler's Holiday, Bizet Dragoons (Carmen), A La Turk, Last Tango in Bayreuth, Night Train, Red River Valley, and more. *Bassoon section, Oregon Symphony.*

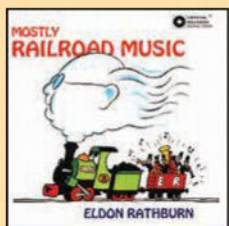
CD875: Captured! The Bassoon Brothers. Fanfare for the Common Bassoonist, Hey Jude, Mexican Hat Dance, My Funny Valentine, Habanera (from Carmen), Godfather Suite, Pizzicato Polka, Roll out the Barrel, Yankee Doodle, Louie Louie, and more. **Sequel to Wanted! and just as hilarious.**



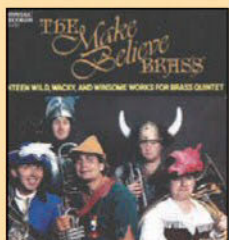
CD430: CHRISTMAS with Chicago Chamber Brass & Glen Ellyn Children's Chorus. 25 traditional Christmas favorites, including Silent Night, Jingle Bells, Deck the Halls, First Noel, We Three Kings, Away in a Manger, Sleigh Ride, O Come Emmanuel, Il Est Ne, Joy to the World, Good King Wenceslas, Hallelujah Chorus, etc. **A top Brass Quintet & a stellar children's chorus.**



CD420: TUBADOURS. Disneyland's favorite tuba quartet. 18 Classical favorites & 17 Christmas traditionals: Nutcracker, Fledermaus, Comedians' Galop, Jingle Bells, Satin Doll, Too Fat Polka, Mouret Rondo, Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, First Noel, God Rest Ye, O Tannenbaum, Away in a Manger, Il Est Ne, We Three Kings, etc. **"wonderfully smooth recording"** (Fanfare)



CD520: MOSTLY RAILROAD MUSIC, by Eldon Rathburn. Delightful CD by one of Canada's foremost film composers. Three Steam Calliope Pieces, Junction (jaw harps), Rise and Fall of the Steam Railroad (calliope, jaw harp, synthesizer, banjos, mandolin, percussion, piano), Ghost Train, Schönberg vs. Gershwin, Dvorak at 155th Street, Hindemith Rides the Merchants Limited, Thoreau's Train, etc. **"an absolutely unique and irresistible collection"** (Fanfare) **"Evocative, imagistic, and delightful. Playful and absorbing. Fascinating."** (Classical disCDigest)



CD432: THE MAKE BELIEVE BRASS, Disneyland's full-time brass ensemble. 18 Wild, Wacky, & Winsome Works for Brass Quintet. Willy Tell Overture, 1812 Opener, Comedian's Galop, Sabre Dance, Over the Waves, Surprise Symphony, Symphony No. 5, Granada, Stars & Stripes, Mancini Medley, Dance of the Hours, In a Persian Market, Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy, etc. **"a lot of fun"** (Fanfare)

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beyond conservatory practice rooms and faculty recitals, Stephanie Sant'Ambrogio shines brilliantly on both her violin, made in 1757 by JB Guadagnini of Milan, and viola, made in 2008 by Jacek Zadlo of Chicago. Her diverse programme yields all kinds of technical challenges, which she effortlessly surmounts, but it is her obvious affection for the music that makes each an absorbing musical experience.

While many of the 19 tracks are short, none is a trifling lollipop in the conventional sense; instead, each is a substantial glimpse into a violinist's universe, from Grażyna Bacewicz's wonderfully graceful *Polish Caprice* and the first recording of the viola version of Ernst Toch's richly discursive *Three Impromptus* to the thornier pleasures of Hindemith and Schnittke.

Further discoveries include Ursula Mamlok's hypnotic *From My Garden*; Fazıl Say's charming, kaleidoscopic *Cleopatra*, written for the 2010 Henri Marteau International Violin Competition; Kenji Bunch's moving *Sarabande*, a piece of simple American poetry with its E string tuned down to D for that Appalachian fiddle effect; and Uruguayan Miguel del Águila's hair-raising *Cortando limones*, commissioned by Sant'Ambrogio to celebrate a kitchen accident and featuring a cricket-like effect called *chicharra*.

Sant'Ambrogio's Baroque set offers its own rewards: a *galant* viola Caprice by Alessandro Rolla, a sizzling Telemann Fantasy which shows a surprisingly powerful side of the composer's upside, and the carelessly seductive, laid-back Biber Passacaglia. **Laurence Vittes**

'Transformations'

D Lang Are You Experienced?^a

Schuller Contrabass Tuba Concerto No 2^b

Stockhausen Harmonien **D Wilson** Concerto for Tuba and Wind Ensemble^c

Aaron Tindall tuba ^a**Steven Stucky** narr

^a**Ithaca College Chamber Orchestra;**

^b**Ithaca College Symphony Orchestra;**

^c**Ithaca College Wind Ensemble /**

^{ab}**Jeffery Meyer, ^cStephen Peterson**

Bridge © BRIDGE9471 (72' • DDD)



Aaron Tindall is an exceptional tuba player, and a curious one. His new recording, 'Transformations', reflects his zeal for expanding the repertoire of his sonorous and dexterous partner in musical crime. In Tindall's hands and



Stephanie Sant'Ambrogio: 'sizzling and seductive' in a programme of well-known and lesser-known works

lips, the instrument is an ideal forum to demonstrate how many characters the tuba can portray.

It is a mercurial figure in Gunther Schuller's Concerto No 2 for Contrabass Tuba and Symphony Orchestra (2008), whose four varied movements confirm the late American composer's meticulous craftsmanship and sensitivity. Tindall negotiates the myriad demands with consummate artistry in vibrant collaboration with the Ithaca College Symphony Orchestra under Jeffery Meyer.

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Harmonien* (2007), the fifth in a six-work cycle, is a solo work of daunting contrasts of mood, range and style. In a far more tonal world, Dana Wilson's Concerto for Tuba and

Wind Ensemble (2013) leans towards the solo instrument's poetic side, while leading to swinging figures in the third movement that give the tuba the chance to brandish its extroverted side.

The disc's surreal blockbuster is David Lang's *Are You Experienced?* (1987/89) for electric tuba, narrator and chamber orchestra. The title is a nod to an early Jimi Hendrix tune, so it may be no wonder that the piece sounds drug-induced, whimsical, and even sentimental. Lang knows how to put on a good show and Tindall how to seize the dramatic moment alongside the narrator (the late composer Steven Stucky) and Ithaca College Chamber Orchestra led by Meyer.

Donald Rosenberg

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Music has a message, if we choose to listen

Tempting as it might be to declare this column a politics-free zone, not least in this, the most festive of seasons, to do so wouldn't really do justice to the relevance we all know music has to the world in the widest sense, something I discussed here last month.

You don't need me to point out that the year ends with many of our countries more aware of their divisions than when it began. The stark light of the democratic process has highlighted a worrying lack of unity and understanding within what are supposed to be shared societies. (Though it's worth remembering of course that many more countries don't even have a democratic process in which such divisions can easily and openly be discussed and addressed.) But given all this, it would perhaps be understandable if we simply sought release from such concerns, and the undoubted challenges they raise, in music – to find transcendence, and escape, through abstract art. But no – to do so would just risk rendering art mere entertainment. This is something that's particularly pertinent, though not unique, to Christmas choral music, which is a focus of many of this month's features, as is usual in our December issue.

Much music of the church is of course simply beautiful in its own right, and can be taken as a pure and uplifting glimpse of heaven, if you like – at one with the soaring ecclesiastical architecture in which it's invariably heard. But the music is meant to do more than that. It's meant to elevate the meaning of the words it sets, not merely subsume them into something pretty and palatable. This is something



Martin

equally shared by great composers of faith and of none: they all recognise the power of what message and music can, combined, convey. It is something that can, of course, be equally true of Lieder and opera. All great art should leave us seeing the world around us, and ourselves, a little differently.

But throughout the world, over the next few weeks, people will gather in churches or halls to sing or hear choral pieces – for some the only annual occasion when they might listen to such music. Some of the set words will speak of sharing peace and goodwill with all men – an important message, but also one that's easy to nod along with and to feel good in doing so. Other words are much more obviously challenging, particularly those which have a bearing on the place that service, or the stranger, or possessions, are meant to play in our lives. Whether you are religious or not, contained in such music is something unsettling – though unsettled, perhaps, is what we need to be.

And when words aren't involved? Purely instrumental music can be just as unsettling. Works written during periods of uncertainty, or during wars, or by composers in happier times and climes but whose work sought nonetheless to explore the difficulties and complexities of life. Such music was never meant to be escapist. So whatever we choose to listen to this season, let's listen with open hearts and minds; and then, emboldened and enlightened by what we have heard, endeavour to try to make our world a better place. A very Happy Christmas to you all.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Rachmaninov's extraordinary *All-Night Vigil* has now become an important part of the Western choral landscape',

says **IVAN MOODY**, author of this month's Collection feature. 'Making a detailed examination of its recorded history was a fascinating voyage of discovery into its history and importance.'



'I've always admired Alison Balsom's determination as a soloist, despite the lack of solo trumpet

repertoire, and in the face of much resistance', says **SARAH KIRKUP**, who writes our cover story. 'It was a pleasure to meet her, and to find that this determination is coupled with great warmth and humility.'



'I long dreamt of being able to play the organ as well as Simon Preston', admits **MARC ROCHESTER**,

writer of this issue's Icons, 'but since that was clearly going to be impossible, I settled for writing about the organ instead. I've enjoyed repaying a bit of the debt I owe to this Great of the organ world.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrell • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

CONTENTS

Volume 94 Number 1143

EDITORIAL

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy / 020 7501 6366
SUB-EDITOR David Thresher / 020 7501 6370
SUB-EDITOR Marija Đurić Speare
ART DIRECTOR Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 7501 6369
AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard
EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
LIBRARIAN Richard Farr
THANKS TO Emma Baker, Hannah Nepil and Charlotte Gardner
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophoneads@markallengroup.com
COMMERCIAL MANAGER
 Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368
SALES EXECUTIVE
 Simon Davies / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 (UK) +44 (0)1722 716997 (overseas)
 subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454
HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL STRATEGY Luca Da Re / 020 7501 6362
MARKETING EXECUTIVE Edward Craggs / 020 7501 6384
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Matthew Cianfani
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997
PRODUCTION MANAGER Jon Redmayne
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997
SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER Chris Hoskins / 01722 716997
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Paul Geoghegan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen
CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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EDITOR'S CHOICE 7

The 12 most highly recommended recordings of the month

FOR THE RECORD 9

The latest classical music news

Reviews

RECORDING OF THE MONTH 48

Pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet concludes his Beethoven sonata cycle on Chandos in style

ORCHESTRAL 50

Tamsin Waley-Cohen plays Adams and Harris violin concertos; masterful MacMillan from the BBC Scottish and Donald Runnicles; a new *Nutcracker* from Valery Gergiev

CHAMBER 70

The Jerusalem Quartet in Bartók; Pierre Fouchenneret and Romain Descharmes play Beethoven; the Brodsky's complete Shostakovich

INSTRUMENTAL 82

Joseph Moog breezes through Chopin sonatas; scholarly Froberger from US harpsichordist Glen Wilson; a round-up of debut piano albums

VOCAL 90

Gesualdo madrigals; Jonas Kaufmann's latest album; mixed sonnets from Johnson and Johnson; Carolyn Sampson's exquisite French programme

OPERA 100

Contrasting Bellini DVDs; Alan Curtis's final Handel recording; Franco Fagioli's florid Rossini

REISSUES 108

De luxe opera sets and Muti's Verdi; the Florilegium series on L'Oiseau-Lyre; the complete works of Bartók and other bargains

REPLAY 116

Charles Munch's Boston legacy on RCA; the art of Hermann Scherchen; the Barylli Quartet

BOOKS 118

Peter Williams's final Bach tome; the Overture Opera Guide to Bellini's *Norma*

GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION 124

Ivan Moody surveys the recording history of Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil*

NEW RELEASES 142

REVIEWS INDEX 144



Features

ALISON BALSOM 10

Sarah Kirkup talks to the pioneering trumpeter about her new Christmas album and more

CLARE COLLEGE 16

Martin Cullingford visits Cambridge to discuss choral life with music director Graham Ross

CRITICS' CHOICE 20

Our critics choose their personal favourites from the past 12 months of releases

CHRISTMAS ROUND-UP 30

Andrew Mellor casts an ear over this season's festive offerings, some more traditional than others

COMPETITIONS GUIDE 35

Our guide to the greatest music competitions, and how fans across the world can tune in

MUSICIAN & SCORE 68

Masaaki Suzuki talks to David Vickers about Mozart's unfinished C minor Mass

ICONS 80

Marc Rochester celebrates the enormous influence of British organist Simon Preston

CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS 88

The perennial appeal of John Rutter's Christmas-infused music is rejoiced by Alexandra Coghlan

CLASSICS RECONSIDERED 120

Caroline Gill and Edward Breen revisit The Tallis Scholars' recording of Josquin's *Missa Pange lingua*

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE 122

The Book of Psalms has been treated in multiple ways through the ages, finds Andrew Mellor

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS 130

The best live music on radio and online

HIGH FIDELITY 133

The latest developments in audio equipment

LETTERS & OBITUARIES 140

MY MUSIC 146

Children's author Julia Donaldson reflects on what classical music means to her

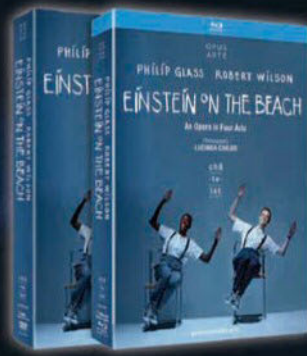
GREAT GIFT IDEAS



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To celebrate the 400th anniversary of the birth of Britain's greatest playwright, this collection brings together 20 productions from the stage of Shakespeare's Globe under the artistic directorship of Dominic Dromgoole.

21 DVD SET



EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH GLASS / WILSON Théâtre du Châtelet

A seminal work from composer Philip Glass and director Robert Wilson. This new production was hailed as 'meticulously crafted total artwork in which the visual and musical craft are inseparable' (Le Figaro). Deluxe packaging includes a luxurious 56 page hardcover book.

DVD | BLU-RAY



POLIUTO DONIZETTI Glyndebourne

Glyndebourne has brought to light a long-overlooked winner in Donizetti's *Poliuto*, delivering 'a superb musical performance' (The Telegraph) offering 'luculent accounts of the principal roles and an incandescent London Philharmonic Orchestra, under Enrique Mazzola' (New York Times).

DVD | BLU-RAY



ROYAL BALLET THE COLLECTION Royal Opera House

This magnificent special edition set brings together 22 ballets spanning a decade of dance. Includes *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, *La Fille mal gardée*, *Rhapsody*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mayerling*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Chroma*, *Infra* and *Limen*.

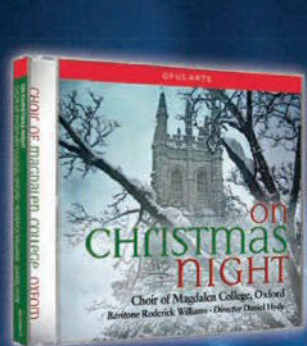
15 DVD SET | 15 BLU-RAY SET



KING & COUNTRY BOX SET SHAKESPEARE Royal Shakespeare Company

King & Country brings together Shakespeare's great cycle of Kings from the famous Royal Shakespeare and director Gregory Doran. This box set includes *Richard II*, *Henry IV* parts I & II, and *Henry V*.

4 DVD SET | 4 BLU-RAY SET



ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT CHOIR OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD

The acclaimed Magdalen College Choir celebrates the diversity of the twentieth-century English carol repertoire in a programme that combines well-loved standards and innovative choir favourites ranging in emotion from quiet contemplation to festive joy.

CD



I DUE FOSCARI VERDI Royal Opera House

Plácido Domingo takes on the role of the tragic Francesco Foscari, Doge of Venice, in Verdi's potent and dramatic opera of family loyalties and political intrigue. Antonio Pappano, Music Director of The Royal Opera, conducts one of Verdi's most striking scores.

DVD | BLU-RAY



CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA MASCAGNI PAGLIACCI LEONCAVALLO Royal Opera House

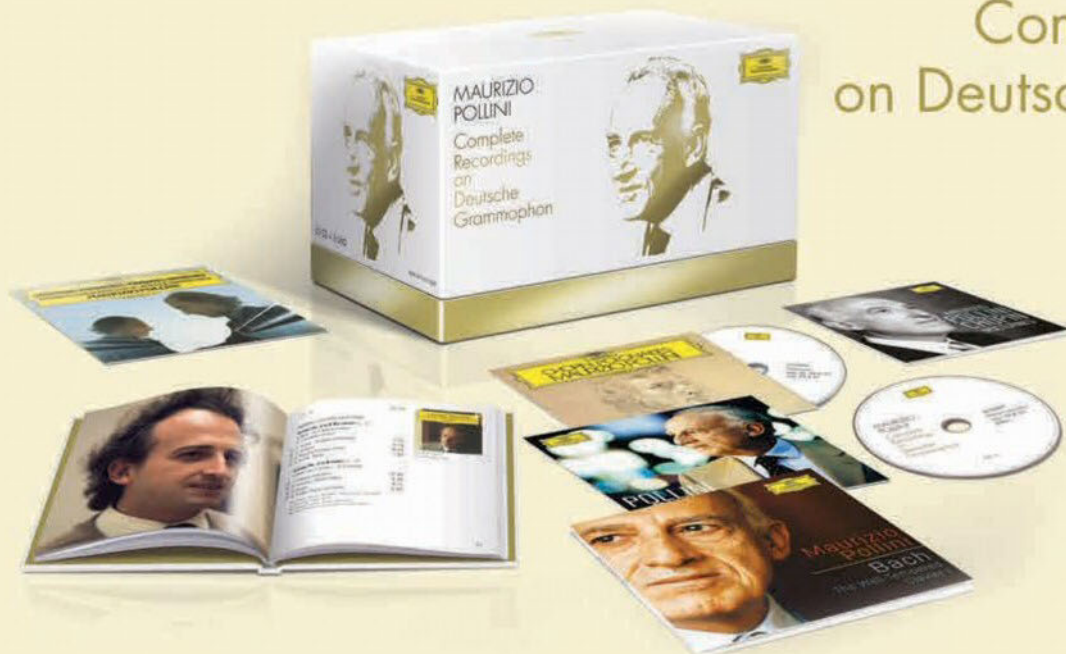
Antonio Pappano conducts award-winning director Damiano Michieletto's new Royal Opera productions of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. Aleksandr Antonenko, Dimitri Platanias, Eva-Maria Westbroek and Carmen Giannattasio lead star casts.

DVD | BLU-RAY



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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Culliford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BEETHOVEN
Piano Sonatas, Vol 3
Jean-Efflam
Bavouzet *pf*
Chandos
► **STEPHEN PLAISTOW'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 48**

This is a really remarkable achievement. Bavouzet's playing seems to balance personality and precision, warm individuality with service to the score. A very fine Beethoven sonata series reaches its end.



ADAMS. HARRIS
Violin Concertos
Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn*
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Litton
Signum

An outstanding performance of the Adams Concerto, but it's the addition of the beautifully played Harris Concerto which really makes this disc something special.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



DVOŘÁK
Slavonic Dances
Czech Philharmonic
Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek
Decca

There's a rich depth to these gloriously played *Slavonic Dances*, on which Bělohlávek floats the melodies with a wonderful sense of natural rhythm.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



VIVALDI
Concerti per due violini
Giuliano Carmignola,
Amandine Beyer *vns*
Gli Incogniti
Harmonia Mundi

A glance at the musicians behind this release tells all you need to know: a compelling sense of dance, and edge-of-seat drama. Very enjoyable indeed.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



VIVALDI. R PANUFNIK
'A Violin for All Seasons'
BBC Symphony Orchestra / Tasmin Little *vn*
Chandos

Vivaldi-playing which draws on a modern orchestra's weight, not to mention on Little's virtuosity, while in Panufnik's piece we're taken on a rewarding and culturally rich journey.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



KROGULSKI Piano Octet
NOWAKOWSKI Piano Quintet
Nelson Goerner *pf et al*
Fryderyk Chopin Institute
Our critic cites this

as 'the most enjoyable chamber music disc – and the most interesting discovery' he's heard in some time. What better encouragement to hear for yourself?

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



F COUPERIN Ariane
conslée par Bacchus
Les Talens Lyriques /
Christophe Rousset
Aparté

'A landmark recording to treasure' writes our critic, and while this lost cantata is a must-hear for Couperin devotees, the atmospheric performance makes it equally so for all.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



MOZART Mass in
C minor, K427
Bach Collegium Japan /
Masaaki Suzuki
BIS

Masaaki Suzuki offers a wonderfully played, powerfully paced and superbly sung Mass in C minor, the prayerfulness, passion and joy palpable throughout.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



'AS DREAMS'
Norwegian Soloists' Choir,
Oslo Sinfonietta /
Grete Pedersen
BIS

Between moments of gripping high-wire skill and ethereal, fragile sound worlds, this is a fascinating, challenging and beautifully recorded example of just what a choir is capable of.

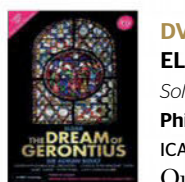
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**



'FIRE MUSIC'
Capella de la Torre /
Katharina Bäuml
DHM

Rhythmically gripping, playful, and entirely infectious – this fire-themed disc from Capella de la Torre is early music at its most earthy, engaging and enjoyable.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 97**



DVD/BLU-RAY
ELGAR The Dream of Gerontius
Sols incl Baker, Pears & Shirley-Quirk; London
Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult
ICA Classics

Our letters pages have expressed great excitement about this release of Boult conducting *Gerontius* in Canterbury Cathedral in 1968: here it is, and it doesn't disappoint!

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
BIZET Carmen
Beecham
Warner Classics
Picking a single set from these attractively

presented opera reissues wasn't easy, but this *Carmen* is an excellent example.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 108**



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Fritz Lehmann's Bach Cantatas and Christmas Oratorio for DG Archiv



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FOR THE RECORD



Leading French soprano Natalie Dessay and the 2016 BBC Young Musician of the Year Sheku Kanneh-Mason

Sony Classical snaps up Natalie Dessay as Sheku Kanneh-Mason joins Decca

Sony Music Entertainment France has signed a long-term recording contract with French soprano Natalie Dessay, who said: 'I'm thrilled to work with Sony, who will accompany me in my new artistic life and new projects like "Pictures of America", Michel Legrand's new cycle of songs, or the Schubert album with Philippe Cassard.'

Dessay joins Sony after 22 years with Virgin Classics (now Erato). Among her most notable recordings is 'Cleopatra', a collection of arias from Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, released in 2011. *Gramophone's* David Vickers commented in his review that 'Dessay's singing is never less than dazzling, and the stratospheric ornaments in the *da capo* of "Venere bella" are softly sensual'.

Dessay will record Legrand's new cycle of songs for Sony, extending a musical partnership on record that already includes the album 'Entre elle et lui: Natalie Dessay Sings Michel Legrand' and the world premiere of the concert version of *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* on DVD and Blu-ray.

Meanwhile, Decca Classics has signed 17-year-old cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason, the winner of this year's BBC Young Musician 2016. The deal will not only see the label making recordings with him, but also offer what it describes as 'long-term support' through his studies.

The first release will be Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No 1, the piece he performed in the BBC Young Musician competition, prompting the judges to

praise his interpretation as 'electrifying, sincere and moving'.

'It is a great honour for me to be joining the Decca Classics family and following in the footsteps of great artists like Mstislav Rostropovich, my musical hero', said Kanneh-Mason, referring to the fact Shostakovich wrote his First Cello Concerto for the great Russian soloist. 'I'm excited to take the next step on my journey and look forward to bringing my passion for classical music to a wider audience.'

IN THE STUDIO

Lars Vogt records Beethoven's piano concertos for Ondine

Lars Vogt is in the process of recording a complete survey of Beethoven's five piano concertos and the Triple Concerto with the Royal Northern Sinfonia for Ondine. The first release is due to appear in April 2017 and will include the First and Fifth concertos. The second volume in the series features the Triple Concerto (with Tanja and Christian Tetzlaff) and the Third Piano Concerto, and is scheduled for release in the autumn of 2017.

NMC and BCMG prepare significant Skempton album

At the end of November, the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group undertook sessions for an all-Howard Skempton release. The album

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GRAMOPHONE ON SPOTIFY

Gramophone has launched on Spotify with six brand new playlists. The focus of the 'Symphony', 'Concerto' and 'Aria' playlists is on legendary recordings of the past alongside modern classics. They comprise *Gramophone* Award-winning albums, Recordings of the Month and Editor's Choices drawn from a wide range of musical periods, from the Baroque to today. 'Reflective strings', 'Choral heaven' and 'Piano contemplation' again draw on outstanding recordings, but all of the pieces included in these three playlists explore a particular mood. Follow our playlists on Spotify today!



will include two major new Skempton works: *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which was premiered by BCMG in 2015, and *Only the Sound Remains*, first performed by BCMG in 2010. Roderick Williams is the baritone soloist in Skempton's setting of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, while Christopher Yates is the viola soloist in *Only the Sound Remains*.

A new Bernstein album from Marin Alsop and the São Paulo Symphony

Marin Alsop's Bernstein recordings for Naxos have been highly acclaimed in these pages: *Chichester Psalms* was our Recording of the Month in October 2003 and *Mass* won a *Gramophone* Award in 2010. This month Alsop is recording a new Bernstein album with the São Paulo Symphony, including *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Suite*, *Candide Overture* and *West Side Story Suite* No 1.

Standing up for the trumpet

Alison Balsom knows her own mind. Carving out a profession as a trumpet soloist – one of just a handful across the world – would be nigh on impossible without the ability to have a vision and stick to it. So I'm not surprised at her response when I ask if the decision to record a new disc of 'Christmassy' trumpet music was hers or her label's.

'Of course my label wants to be commercially successful', she says. 'And Christmas is a natural time to release music for

the trumpet – they're obvious partners. But I've had a lot of say in my albums – I've curated them all.

And this one gives me the opportunity to explore some glorious repertoire.'

I don't doubt her for a minute. From the beginning of her career, Balsom has approached every new project with integrity. By necessity, owing to the trumpet's limited solo repertoire, she has incorporated transcriptions and arrangements into her recordings and performances, but *Gramophone* critics have been unanimous in their praise for this musician who is able to lend a distinctive new voice to old warhorses. As Lindsay Kemp wrote of 'Sound the Trumpet', her 2012 disc of Handel and Purcell: 'This is rattling good music, and so easily does the trumpet fit into it that often it is hard to recall what the original scorings were anyway.'

We're sitting in Balsom's stylish, open-plan living room in leafy Herne Hill, south-east London, on a rainy June afternoon and sipping peppermint tea while Balsom fills me in on 'Jubilo'. Inspired by seasonal Baroque repertoire and recently released by Warner Classics, this latest disc includes a new arrangement of Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* and several Bach transcriptions – *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* and *In dulci jubilo*, alongside the six Schübler Chorales, BWV645-650 (including *Wachet auf* from Cantata BWV140). There are also performances of the Trumpet Concerto in D by Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758) and the Sonata in D by Giuseppe Torelli

(1658-1709), another concerto in all but name.

For the Bach pieces, Balsom performs on a modern trumpet and is joined by Stephen Cleobury on organ (plus, in *Jesu, joy*, the angelic voices of the Choir of King's College, Cambridge). For the concertos, she plays a natural trumpet and is joined by the Academy of Ancient Music. 'This is the first time I've played modern and Baroque trumpet on the same disc', she admits. 'It's not normally done – modern pitch is A=440, Baroque is A=415 – but if you're careful about how you order the pieces, it can work.'

'It's wonderful when people compliment my sound but some say, "I can tell you're a girl, you sound so elegant", and I think, "No!"'

When we meet, it's only the day after she's finished recording the tracks featuring the Academy of Ancient Music.

Any concerns she may have had about the validity of an arrangement of Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* were banished when they started rehearsing. 'These players know the most stylish way to interpret Baroque music, so I was a bit timid at the beginning', she confesses. 'But they seemed to genuinely embrace it, so I just thought, "Let's go for it!"' On the recording, this work is played with total conviction, Balsom's clarion trumpet sound lending a welcome colour to the overall texture yet still blending effortlessly with the strings.

FOCUSING ON THE SOUND

Read any Alison Balsom review and her sound is mentioned straight away, and often more than once. 'She has a true soloist's flair with a firm and highly focused sound without a hint of forced tone', wrote Jonathan Freeman-Attwood in 2003; more recently, Richard Bratby, reviewing her 2016 album 'Legende', enthused: 'I enjoyed the sweetness of her muted tone...she can make her lines sing.'

It's this singing quality of Balsom's tone, her ability to relate to her instrument's 'human' characteristic, that has led her to record transcriptions of vocal pieces in the past, from Purcell's 'Fairest Isle' (*King Arthur*) to the spiritual *Nobody Knows*. And her conviction that vocal music can work on the trumpet is evident once again in 'Jubilo', specifically

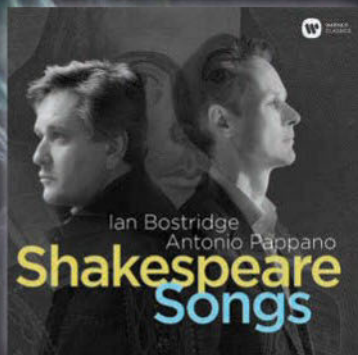
Alison Balsom is determined to get her instrument heard, she tells Sarah Kirkup, because, as her new Christmas disc goes to prove, its capabilities are endless





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in the Bach chorales. 'The sound worlds of trumpet and organ just match gorgeously', she says. 'I'm playing the chorale melody, the vocal line, so it's all about the voice.'

Balsom spends hours every day striving for the perfect sound, beginning with exercises that help her throat and lungs to work properly. 'I'm always thinking about the breath', she tells me. 'It's a wonderful compliment when people highlight my sound, but some say, "I can tell you're a girl because it sounds so elegant", and I think, "No!"'. Players like Maurice André and Wynton Marsalis can make the most feminine as well as masculine sounds, because being a trumpet player is about making a sound that's *varied*.'

She continues: 'The trumpet has the capability of making many colours, so it's about having a wide palette. Every morning I'm aware of sound production being the most important thing, but I don't actually think I sound hugely different from when I was seven years old.'

Balsom's early encounters with the trumpet – getting hooked on a recording of Dizzy Gillespie and being subsequently inspired by Swedish virtuoso Håkan Hardenberger, with whom she eventually studied – have been well documented, as have her views on being a female trumpeter in a male-dominated world. With regards to the latter, she is resigned to the fact that she's likely to generate interest because of her gender. And if this helps to introduce more people to the trumpet, and its beauty and versatility as an instrument, then she can live with that. But ultimately, she feels that the debate around gender misses the point; that being a successful trumpet player, male or female, is about more than simply having the necessary physical strength to play it. 'It's easy to make it into a sport, to say, "You can play high or loud, therefore you can play the trumpet". But no, that's not interesting.' She continues: 'It's like the opposite of showing off. You need the strength to play loudly, but then you need the strength to play even louder, and then you need even more strength to reign it back in and play quietly. That's when it becomes beguiling.'

On the day of our interview, Balsom is – despite appearing enviably fresh-faced – exhausted from recording until late the night before and, like many working mothers, trying to juggle the various components of her life which, in her case, include rehearsals, recordings, touring and, most pressingly, the school run. Her six-year-old son Charlie (with her



'Spiritual home': Balsom's love of the Baroque trumpet led to 'Gabriel' at The Globe

ex-partner, the conductor Edward Gardner) will be left standing outside the school gate on his own if we don't wrap up the interview on time. (We do.) And yet, the passion she has for her instrument is unwavering – and this is what makes her such an exciting musician to witness live in concert.

CHANNELLING THE MUSIC

Balsom has spoken in the past about battling with nerves but, she tells me, over time she has become better at focusing on the music itself. 'Communicating who you are through the music is much more important than sound and technique', she says.

'If you can immerse yourself in this music (and that's

what's so glorious about being a classical musician – the material speaks for itself!) and harness your feelings – your nerves, the fact that you care so much about this performance – and put it all into the music, your conscious mind isn't even there. You're channelling this great art.' She pauses for breath. 'It doesn't always happen', she admits. 'Sometimes it feels like an uphill run! But the ultimate goal, of course, should be to move your audience emotionally.'

She says that she takes comfort from the fact that artists such as Radu Lupu, whose musicianship she 'adores', have also gone through periods of performance anxiety. 'It makes me realise, you're *allowed* to feel something', she says. 'As a trumpet player, it's the high wire – if it doesn't go well, everyone knows about it. But you want the audience to be with you, to be on the edge of their seats thinking, "Is she going to make it?". They don't just want to be impressed – they want to *feel* something.'

Recreating that excitement in the recording studio can be more challenging, although she recalls that 'it was definitely there' during the past few days with the Academy of Ancient Music. 'Everything was in perfect alignment', she says. Perhaps this was

because, as Balsom herself admits, the Baroque trumpet is her 'spiritual home'. She first recorded on the instrument in 2002 for an acclaimed period instrument debut (with the Parley of Instruments for Hyperion), and when Warner Classics asked her to make another recording of Baroque music (following on from her all-Bach disc in 2006 and 'Italian Concertos' in 2010), Balsom jumped at the chance to do it on period instruments with The English Concert and Trevor Pinnock. But the resulting 'Sound the Trumpet' disc of 2012 is only half the story.



Crossing genres: Balsom plays Guy Barker's *The Lanterne of Light* at the 2015 Proms



Brass for Africa: as charity patron, Balsom helped instigate the building of a new music school in Kampala



Insights: Balsom, pictured here with pianist Tom Poster at a Times event, is happy to talk to her audiences

‘To arrange for natural trumpet is a crazy thing to do because it doesn’t have all the notes of the scale’, recalls Balsom. ‘It took 10 months to transcribe this music of Handel and Purcell. But they’re such masters of writing for the trumpet, and for the other instruments whose music I stole, and it seemed to turn into this big, theatrical project.’ As a soloist who is always ‘hungry for new music’, Balsom has had to be enterprising and resourceful throughout her career; both these skills came into

‘I thought, “No one makes a career of doing this full-time”. But I learnt to be brave, to forge ahead along a path that didn’t exist’

play here when, equipped with all this music, she had the idea of performing it as a semi-staged concert at The Globe. Not only did the theatre’s director Dominic Dromgoole like the concept, he wanted to take it to a whole new level. Balsom continues the story: ‘He said, “Let’s do a run. You can have my company of actors. But I can’t pay the orchestra so you’ll have to raise the money yourself.”’ This would be a daunting prospect for anyone, let alone a musician with a full-time concert schedule,

but Balsom was undeterred: ‘It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my career – I had to use all my contacts’, she remembers. ‘But I’ll never forget that first day when the orchestra and actors all came together. There were 60 people in the room and I thought, “Wow, this is actually going to happen!”’

The resulting show, *Gabriel*, a vibrant portrait of London following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 by playwright Samuel Adamson, was performed during the summer of 2013 and hailed a great success. And that success was due, in no small part, to the trumpet soloist, with one critic writing: ‘The exquisite nature of this instrument wins out, with Balsom beautiful to listen to (let alone behold).’

FORGING A NEW PATH

One of the advantages of being a pioneer in a particular field is that there’s no precedent, no ultimate goal, which means that there’s more than one way of getting it right. So it has proved with Balsom who, when she started out, didn’t even know if making a living from being a classical trumpet soloist was possible. ‘I thought, no one makes a career of doing this full-time, I don’t even know if I can earn enough to pay the mortgage’, she admits. ‘But that’s been a huge advantage. If I was a violinist, I’d be treading in the footsteps of so many people before me. As it is, I have found immense freedom and endless creative possibilities.’ She continues: ‘I learnt to be brave, even though sometimes things didn’t work out. I kept forging ahead along a path that didn’t exist – with *Gabriel*, with repertoire, with the commissioning of new works.’

When James MacMillan composed *Seraph* for her in 2010, it was, as Balsom said at the time, ‘the high point of my career’. Commissioned by the Scottish Ensemble, it was premiered at

Wigmore Hall in February 2011. The recording was released the following year, and Balsom told *Gramophone* that she was keen to get Thomas Adès and John Adams to write pieces for her, too. While that hasn’t yet happened (‘I’m still working on it!’), in 2014 she premiered *Joie Eternelle*, a concerto by Qigang Chen co-commissioned by the Proms and the China Philharmonic. Then, at the Proms last year, she performed *The Lanterne of Light*, a BBC commission from Guy Barker, the renowned jazz musician with whom Balsom collaborated on her ‘Paris’ album. Balsom is thrilled that both pieces seem to be finding life beyond their premieres; she’s just performed *Joie Eternelle* again with the Munich Philharmonic and is hopeful that it will become part of the repertoire, ‘even though it’s ridiculously challenging, technically’. She is convinced that it’s only a matter of time before other composers – including, she hopes, Hans Abrahamsen – will see the trumpet’s potential. ‘It has so many colours, it’s powerful...in my opinion, it’s the instrument of today’, she says. ‘There’s so much scope to use the trumpet as a concerto instrument in contemporary music.’

Laying the foundations for the next generation is surely the legacy most musicians hope to leave behind, and Balsom is no exception. Her involvement in the commissioning of new music for the trumpet is significant in this respect and so, too, is her

teaching at conservatoires across the world. 'I give my all in masterclasses', she says. 'I'm shattered by the end, which is why I can't do them on the afternoon of a concert, as much as I'd like to. It's obvious really...Håkan Hardenberger, John Miller, John Wallace, plus people like Trevor Pinnock, have all given me some brilliant coaching and I need to pass that on.'

Balsom acknowledges that having a public platform means she can share her insights with paying audiences, too, both at her own concerts and at larger events such as 'Imagining the Future of Medicine' at the Royal Albert Hall in 2014, at which she gave a talk called 'Music as a Healer'. 'I'm in this privileged position where I have a voice', she says. 'I can highlight things, like subsidised music lessons, which need highlighting. And audiences are curious', she adds. 'They want to know how you're feeling, how you're working with an orchestra. It's not taking away any of the magic to show that you're a human being.'

She has also used her voice in outreach programmes such as Brass for Africa, of which she has been a patron since 2014. 'After a trip to Uganda, I could see what a difference the brass band was making on these children's lives', she tells me, visibly emotional. 'I found myself at a dinner sitting next to someone from the Sainsbury's Trust and told him about the charity. Just a few months later, a four-storey music building was being built in the slums of Kampala. How could I live with myself if, knowing I have this power, I didn't use it?'

BEING TRUE TO HERSELF

But while Balsom accepts and enjoys the responsibilities that come with being a soloist of her calibre, it's the playing she always returns to. 'Everything I do off stage feels like an extra to the nucleus of who I am, the most pure form of how I can express myself – which is playing the trumpet', she says. Which explains why her diary is fit to bursting with recitals, tours and large-scale concerts. This October, she launched her Wigmore Hall residency with a programme of Honegger, Hindemith, Schubert and Enescu; true to form, she also performed a piece she composed with pianist Tom Poster, *The Thoughts of Dr May* (inspired by Queen's Brian May), as well as her own transcription of Brahms's Horn Trio, with BBC Young Musician of the Year winner Peter Moore on trombone. The residency ends on December 20 with an eclectic programme including music from her 'Jubilo' disc and culminating in an arrangement of Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*. 'I wouldn't normally programme something like that for the Wigmore but it *is* Christmas!', she says, laughing.

Prior to that, she will have toured Germany, Switzerland and Austria with the Basel Chamber Orchestra performing the Hummel Concerto, and she has future plans which include a Baroque collaboration with soprano Lucy Crowe, a late-night jazz concert with Guy Barker and another solo show at the Royal Albert Hall. Her diverse programmes have the advantage of appealing to a wide range of audiences but that's not the main reason she does them: 'The diversity of my repertoire is because I have diverse tastes', she insists. 'Lighter pieces aren't my passion but if you're doing Enescu, Hindemith and Françaix in a recital, I have no problem with doing a Gershwin encore. Just because it's accessible, that doesn't mean it's a compromise.'

What makes her happiest, as a musician? 'It's a balance', she admits. 'I love to play the Haydn and the Hummel with great orchestras, I enjoy doing early music and commissioning new music, and I love transcribing and arranging things as I have for this Christmas album...All in all, I think that's enough to keep me musically fulfilled.' **G**

► Read Gramophone's review of Alison Balsom's 'Jubilo' on page 67

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IN PRAISE OF THE SEASON

As Clare College's liturgical series on *Harmonia Mundi* sets its sights on Epiphany, Martin Cullingford talks about choral life with the choir's music director Graham Ross

You may have in your hands our Christmas issue, but let us take you beyond the festivities, past the New Year celebrations, and into Epiphany. The season – most commonly associated with the visitation of the Magi, but which also marks Christ's Baptism and His first miracle – is the focus of the latest recording from the Choir of

Clare College, Cambridge. But it's also a season whose music and imagery (and distinct meaning) invariably become wrapped up in the colour and chaos of pre-Christmas festivities. Just as, for that matter, does the season of Advent, more properly a time of reflective and expectant vigil, not of Christmas parties, commercialism and celebratory excess.

Before you accuse me of being a bit ‘bah humbug’, I should say I’d be the last person to begrudge the congregations at an end-of-year school or company carol service (many of whom might not attend a choral service at any other time) the chance to hear such beautiful pieces as Warlock’s *Bethlehem Down* or to join in with *As with Gladness Men of Old*. But it is an issue that lies at the heart of the fascinating series of liturgical music recordings that have emerged from the Cambridge choir and its director Graham Ross on Harmonia Mundi over the past four years. In a society less structured around the rhythms of the church calendar (or, for that matter, around the church itself), popular awareness of how church music is related to the liturgical year, with its powerful narrative of preparation, celebration, repentance and redemption, is perhaps not what it might be. This is something Ross hopes Clare’s series will better open our minds to – and, as he says with touching humility: ‘I would add to that mine as well.’

Other discs in the series have taken in the feasts or seasons of Easter, All Saints and All Souls, Ascension and Pentecost, Christmas, Passiontide, Advent, and music for Corpus Christi has just been recorded, too. Each has its own distinct mood and meaning, and the series has sought to capture those colours and contrasts.

But setting aside the theology, it’s also an approach to programming that allows for an extraordinary diversity of repertoire – as Ross puts it, ‘Old, new, *a cappella*, accessible, slightly more challenging, familiar, less familiar’ – to appear on a single disc that still possesses a strong sense of thematic cohesion. And it’s something that, Ross says, reflects the chapel’s repertoire. ‘I hope that at pretty much any service at Clare you can feel perfectly comfortable about hearing some Monteverdi next to, say, some Dyson, alongside a new commission. The purists might say that’s a bit chop-and-change, that it’s a bit startling moving between the different parts of the canon, but it comes down to me making sure the students have a complete, fulfilling musical education.’

Regarding the Epiphany disc, Ross was clear about which repertoire to include: ‘I definitely wanted to do a fair bit of early music from the 16th century, because I think it’s really important that students familiarise themselves with that repertoire.’ A highlight in this respect is the earliest work on the disc, *Nesciens mater* by Jean Mouton. ‘It has a wonderful angle to it’, says Ross, ‘because it’s essentially an academic exercise, albeit one that is incredibly well-crafted. It is a masterful piece of polyphony, and yet of course on listening to it it sounds so sublime that one forgets the ingenuity.’

Of music from the 20th century, Ross was keen to include ‘some of the familiar things, Warlock’s *Benedicamus Domino*, *The Three Kings* of Cornelius – things that are definitely not Christmas pieces, that we obviously wouldn’t have put on the Christmas disc or the Advent disc before that’. To accompany those, he was looking for pieces ‘to pique one’s interest’, he says: ‘Judith Weir’s *Illuminare*, *Jerusalem* is a piece I’ve loved for a long time, and I think she’s a great composer. Then there’s the piece by Judith Bingham, *Epiphany*, which was new to me – a colleague introduced it to me, and it’s a very effective piece.’

The starting point, however, was the fairly epic work for double choir by Arnold Bax, *Mater ora filium*, from which the disc takes its name – something Ross had wanted to record for some time. ‘It’s not a piece you can do every year with the students because it takes quite a bit of learning’, he explains.

‘It divides into so many parts, so you need a choir who can do that.’ One of the challenges of leading a collegiate choir is that a conductor doesn’t know, year by year, exactly what it’s going to be like in terms of size and capability. But last year’s choir – which recorded the Epiphany disc – helpfully turned out to be slightly larger than usual. ‘I proposed the Bax to them, and when we started rehearsing it they looked at me strangely, as if to say, “What *are* you thinking?” But then it just became a process of learning it over the course of a few weeks, and it was a great thing to record, and a fantastic challenge for them.’

Another challenge for a college choir when singing repertoire from the liturgical feasts is that they’re not around for most of them. ‘I knew when we started this series that we were going to encounter some problems. If you record a disc of music for, say, Corpus Christi [which usually falls mid-May to mid-June], in a funny way it’s an easy thing to do because you schedule it around your services for Corpus Christi. But if you’re going to record a disc of music for Epiphany, typically we’re not here on January 6. But of course once you’ve started a series of

liturgical feasts you can’t just miss one out!’ The happy flipside is that the choir gets to perform music that might not otherwise have been in their repertoire.

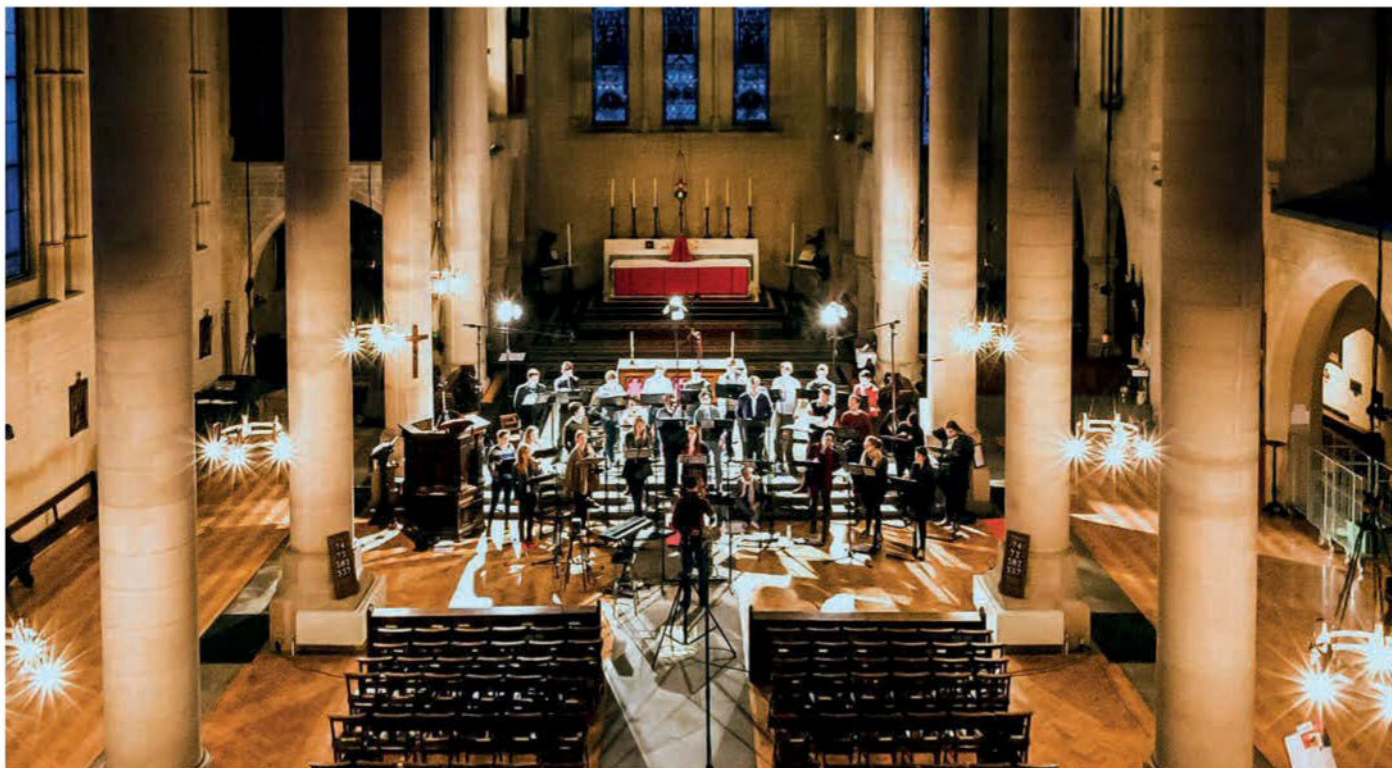
When Ross speaks about his choir, which he took over in 2010 aged just 25, it’s with a sense of pride, but also with a clear sense of its place and purpose within an educational institution. It may not have the heritage of near neighbours King’s and St John’s, which draw boy choristers from their respective schools. But in the decades since its formation in the early 1970s – when Clare became one of the first all-male colleges to admit women – it has earned a deserved name for itself as a leading adult mixed-voice choir, not least on record.

Does Ross feel his choir has a specific sound, and if so, what might that be? ‘I would like to think it does, but I think it’s quite difficult to discern what it is, because every year you’ve not really got any idea of who’s going to apply to the college. And you have to remember that in the time between when they audition for me, and when they arrive in October – or even the October after that if they’re applying for deferred entry – their voices can change tremendously. They can audition as a coloratura soprano and arrive as a low *mezzo*! So you can see the potential and hear what the voice will become, but you have to hone the sound around the material you’ve got. It’s different from, say, a concert choir, where you can cherry-pick your voices as befits the repertoire.’

As to how he sees the choir fitting into the wider college, Ross is always aware of the importance of education in underpinning everything it does. ‘I feel quite strongly that, while the members of the choir are here to sing the music of the liturgy, and to have fun while doing so, they’re also here to learn, and improve. Of course that’s true in their academic studies’ – and it’s worth noting that most choir members are studying subjects other than music – ‘but of course they should have an education for the three or four years they’re in the choir too. So it’s important to open their eyes and ears to repertoire they’re new to – not necessarily contemporary, but music they haven’t experienced before.’ As Ross recalls, whenever the choir learns a piece like the *St John Passion* or the B Minor Mass for the first time ‘it must be like when the initial scores were released – it’s great to see that on their faces, and to see that journey of discovery’.

The process of recording itself is an integral part of the students’ education, too. ‘I’m really impressed with them,

‘While the choir members are here to sing the music of the liturgy, and to have fun while doing so, they’re also here to learn’



'Extra bloom': Graham Ross likes the fuller acoustic of All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, the recording venue for his choir's newest disc celebrating Epiphany

they really treat it seriously', Ross says. 'During a session, if I am pleased with a particular take and happy to move on, they sometimes ask to do one more to ensure we have correctly recorded a particular bar. I really respect that. Musically, the process of recording really switches them on. It's a good thing for me, too, and actually I find it almost more satisfying than giving concerts and touring, however glitzy and glamorous all that is.'

Ross doesn't record in the college's elegant, light-filled 18th-century chapel, situated across the architecturally exquisite Old Court from the music director's rooms in which we're sitting: 'It's a beautiful chapel to sing in, a beautiful acoustic, and particularly good for solo and chamber stuff. But it is too small to record in – generally I like to have a little extra bloom.' The Epiphany disc was recorded in All Hallows' Church, Gospel Oak, and in the chapel of Tonbridge School, the latter's acoustic and organ better suited to the accompanied works. Other recording venues have included Lincoln Cathedral and Ely Cathedral's Lady Chapel. But Ross also feels that learning to sing within other acoustics is an additional challenge which only adds to the students' overall experience.

'If you can put down something on disc that is going to stand the test of time, then that's a very good skill to learn in a choir, and I take my hat off to the singers – they really want to get it right. I suppose I've fostered that environment, slightly, but it comes from them as well, which makes my job a lot easier, and a lot more enjoyable.' Sitting in on rehearsals for the day's Evensong offers me an insight into that environment. Ross combines a relaxed manner with a seriousness of expectation. Authority feels lightly worn but is undeniably there. He clearly takes his students, and the

music, seriously, and they appear to repay him in kind with focus and effort.

There are more discs from the series to come, but Ross is confident that the fruitful relationship he's formed with Harmonia Mundi – which has also yielded an album of music by Imogen Holst and a programme of music exploring remembrance – will continue with individual projects such as, next year, a disc to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

But for Ross, the importance of the choir is not limited to the

enriching experiences of the singers alone. He is keen for the chapel to be at the heart of the college, whether for worshippers or just for those seeking the spiritual nourishment of beautiful

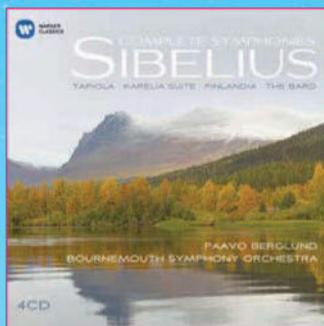
music and prayer. The Evensong I attend is pleasingly well supported (so well in fact that they run out of wine at the post-service drinks!). Sunday Evensongs are also preceded by a recital, designated as a preparation for worship, and which this week saw a second-year undergraduate baritone perform works by Butterworth, Moeran and Ireland. Ross also cites the success of Compline, sung at 10pm several times a term in the candlelit chapel and always hugely popular. New music nights are held in Clare Cellars, an atmospheric venue in the crypt below the chapel.

Like all college chapels, Clare is welcoming of visitors. But for those not able to get to Cambridge or who, if they do, fail to turn down the cobbled lane that leads away from the more familiar tourist trail of King's Parade and Trinity Street towards Clare, then these recordings provide a rewarding insight into what they're missing. 'The best thing we can offer is to present a snapshot of what we do, day in, day out, in chapel', says Ross. And, one might add, by illuminating the feasts and seasons of the Christian year as celebrated by composers throughout the centuries, a snapshot of the liturgical life of the church itself. **G**

► 'Remembrance' is reviewed on page 91; 'Epiphany' is reviewed on page 98

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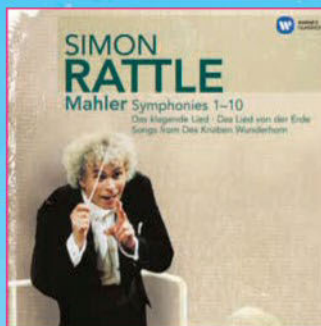
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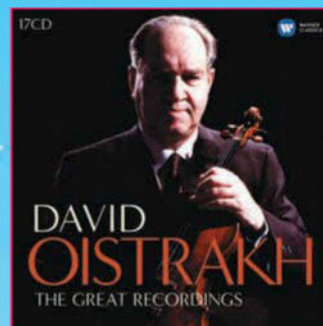
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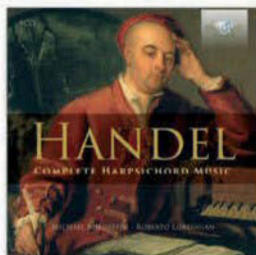


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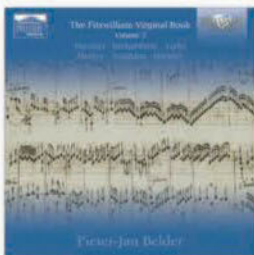
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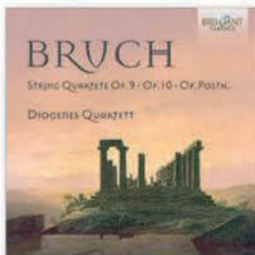
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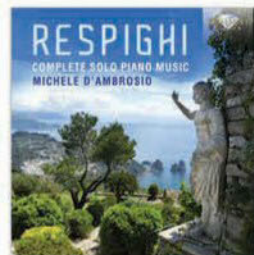
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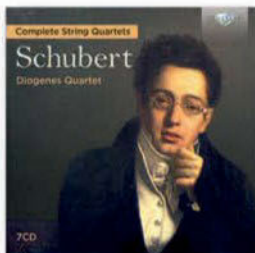
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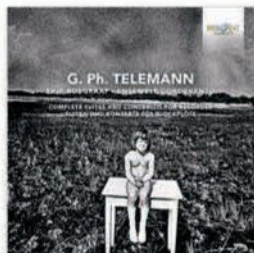
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Our critics each choose a favourite recording from the past 12 months. For the perfect Christmas gift guide, look no further!

Andrew Achenbach

Elgar Cello Concerto **Walton** Cello Concerto
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Steven Isserlis vc
Philharmonia Orchestra / Paavo Järvi
Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68077 (3/16)



Steven Isserlis's eagerly anticipated return to Elgar's autumnal masterpiece captivates in its unexaggerated depth of feeling,

suppleness of expression, tingling spontaneity and beaming fantasy. He receives scrupulously sympathetic support from the Philharmonia under Paavo Järvi. Enticing couplings, too – Walton's Concerto and Holst's seductive *Invocation* both enjoying gloriously trenchant advocacy.



Nalen Anthoni

Beethoven *Missa solemnis*
Soloists; Arnold Schoenberg Choir;
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Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Sony Classical Ⓜ ② 88985 31359-2 (8/16)



Why begin the *Missa solemnis* on a weak beat? Does it herald a setting fraught with Beethoven's ambiguity about faith? Harnoncourt senses anxieties as

penetratingly as he does the composer's unequivocal moment, Beethoven's awe of the Divine recreated here in a numinous Praeludium and Benedictus of inspiring grace.

Tim Ashley

'Nèère' *Mémoires* by Chausson, Duparc and Hahn
Véronique Gens sop **Susan Manoff** pf
Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA215 (1/16)



Gramophone's 2016 Solo Vocal Award-winner, Veronique Gens and Susan Manoff's 'Nèère', is arguably the most beautiful and thoughtful disc of

French song of recent years. The programme re-evaluates Reynaldo Hahn by placing him alongside his elder and better-known contemporaries Duparc and Chausson. The singing and playing are exquisite.

David Allen

Elgar *Symphony No 1*
Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim
Decca Ⓢ 478 9353DH (5/16)

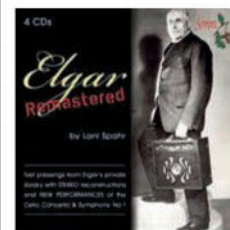


Daniel Barenboim's return to Elgar's First is a discomfiting reading – often uneasy, at times shy when it might be grandiose. To some it might be unconvincing, but to me, it is precisely its ambivalence that convinces. The vision from the podium is unique; the playing it draws is peerless.

"Nèère" is arguably the most beautiful and thoughtful disc of French song of recent years' – Tim Ashley

Mike Ashman

'Elgar Remastered'
Various artists /
Sir Edward Elgar
Somm Ⓢ ④
SOMMCD261/4 (A/16)



Elgar conducting himself in stereo? Beatrice Harrison in the Cello Concerto with the apparent miracle of the orchestra

(and occasionally singing composer) spread out behind her on two channels? Lani Spahr's four-disc 'Elgar Remastered' is unmissable gramophone archaeology.

Richard Bratby

'Gershwin in Hollywood'

John Wilson Orchestra / John Wilson
Warner Classics (P) 2564 64937-3 (6/16)

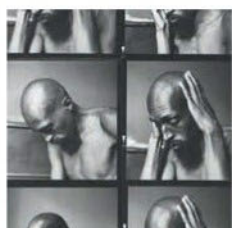


Superbly reconstructed arrangements of some of the greatest songs of the 20th century, performed with breathtaking élan by artists who sound like they're in love. There are a million good reasons to hear this disc; I've chosen it simply because nothing I've heard this year has given me more joy.

Philip Clark

Eastman Femenine SEM Ensemble

Frozen Reeds (P) FR6 (12/16)

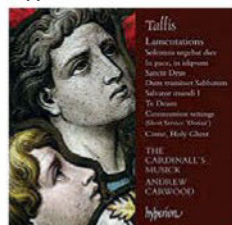


No modern composition release provoked more comment during 2016 than this previously unissued, assumed lost, recording of a major

ensemble work by the American composer Julius Eastman (1940-90). Minimalism crashes headlong into improvisation in this live recording from 1974 by Petr Kotik's SEM Ensemble. And I couldn't stop playing it.

Edward Breen

Tallis Lamentations and other sacred music
The Cardinal's Musick / Andrew Carwood
Hyperion (P) CDA68121 (5/16)



Tallis's *Lamentations of Jeremiah* are extremely well wrought and ravishing polyphonic works which have inspired many recordings. Here,

The Cardinal's Musick find a gravitas and rich vocal sonority reminiscent of The Taverner Consort (EMI, 5/89) which is peerless among male vocal ensemble releases.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Amuse-Bouche' French Choral Delicacies
I Fagiolini / Robert Hollingworth
Decca (P) 478 9394 (4/16)



There's something irresistible and intoxicating about hearing an ensemble taking such pleasure in making music with each other. That joy and communicative

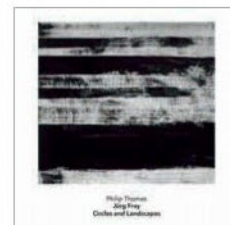
energy absolutely sings from this recording, making it a winner even before you take into account the provocative collision of repertoire, marrying the sacred and earthly sensual with breathtaking audacity.

Liam Cagney

Frey Circles and Landscapes

Philip Thomas pf

Another Timbre (P) AT91 (4/16)



The past year saw the German-based Wandelweiser collective move into the limelight. This disc of solo piano music by Jürg Frey captures well the

movement's predilection for quietness, delicate poise and a sometimes entrancing neo-tonality.

'Joy and communicative energy absolutely sings from I Fagiolini's recording'

— Alexandra Coghlan

Rob Cowan

Reger Four Violin Sonatas, Op 42

Ulf Wallin vn

CPO (P) CPO777 762-2 (9/16)



Predictably, in this Max Reger centenary year, I choose a recording of his music ('If not now when', as Rabbi Hillel the Elder might have said). Ulf Wallin treats

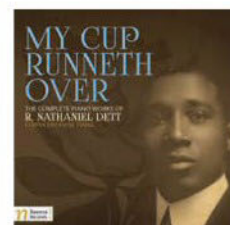
the solo violin sonatas to a plethora of colours, the Fourth, or last of them, in particular, which concludes with a 'Reger Chaconne' in all but name. Bachian it may be but individual too, a celebration of an instrument that Reger knew and loved well.

Jed Distler

Dett 'My Cup Runneth Over'

Clipper Erickson pf

Navona (M) 2 NV6013 (1/16)



Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) was one of the first African-American composers to seriously and successfully fuse

Negro folk and spiritual roots with European art-music traditions. Clipper Erickson's deeply committed and superbly engineered interpretations of the composer's complete piano works make an eloquent case for this repertoire's extraordinary scope and depth.

Jeremy Dibble

Stanford Piano Concerto No 2.

Works for solo piano

Benjamin Frith pf

BBC National Orchestra of Wales /

Andrew Gourlay

Champs Hill (P) CHRCDO42 (7/16)

As one of the most voluptuous, nostalgic and lyrical works in the Romantic tradition, Stanford's Piano Concerto No 2 is given a generous, affectionate and expressive interpretation by Benjamin Frith and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Andrew Gourlay. Of particular note here is the poignant sense of chamber music which characterises

much of the first and second movements, while Frith's muscular treatment of the big second subject in the last movement is compelling.



Adrian Edwards

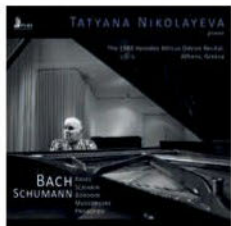
Britten. Korngold Violin Concertos
Vilde Frang *vn* Frankfurt Radio
 Symphony Orchestra / James Gaffigan
 Warner Classics (F) 2564 60092-1 (2/16)



Vilde Frang opens up new vistas in these two violin concertos, one written to entertain, the other with loftier intentions. Frang's Korngold melts the heart, and her performance of the Britten tugs at it in a manner I've never experienced before. Conductor and orchestra are at one with her vision.

David Fanning

'The 1989 Herodes Atticus Odeon Recital'
Tatyana Nikolaieva *pf*
 First Hand Records (F) FHR46 (11/16)



I was hovering between the DVD of Weinberg's *The Passenger* (2/16) and Vol 4 of Christian Blackshaw's Mozart sonatas (1/16), when along came Tatyana Nikolaieva's live Athens recital of Bach, Schumann, Ravel and others, capturing all the wisdom, authority and richness of tone that made her a legend. Unmissable for pianophiles.

Richard Fairman

Schubert Lieder
Benjamin Appl *bar* **Graham Johnson** *pf*
 Wigmore Hall Live (M) WHLIVE0082 (7/16)



In the refined world of the song recital Benjamin Appl is the new kid on the block. His first solo recordings arrived in 2016 and, of the two, his Wigmore Hall Live recital is the one that best shows off his accomplishments. Here is an engagingly sung Schubert programme, a recording of high promise for the future of *Gramophone's* Young Artist of 2016.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Brahms Violin Sonatas
Christian Tetzlaff *vn* **Lars Vogt** *pf*
 Ondine (F) ODE1284-2D (9/16)



This is one of those rare recordings that's given me fresh appreciation for old friends. Christian Tetzlaff and Lars Vogt convey a sense of wide-eyed discovery, ardent conviction and warm affection in Brahms's violin sonatas that's not only immensely satisfying but unexpectedly moving as well.

David Fallows

Dufay 'Les Messes à teneur'
Cut Circle / Jesse Rodin
 Musique en Wallonie (M) ②
 MEW1577/8 (7/16)



Beyond any question, the high point of my reviewing year was Jesse Rodin conducting the vocal group Cut Circle in the four great tenor Masses that are more or less all that survives of Dufay's late maturity. They stand as key works in the history of Western music.

Neil Fisher

Elgar Symphony No 1
Staatskapelle Berlin / **Daniel Barenboim**
 Decca (F) 478 9353DH (5/16)



Daniel Barenboim plops Elgar's First squarely in a tradition of Wagner, Bruckner and Brahms. Marshalling his Berlin players' virtuosity, he finds extra levels of impulsiveness and cragginess, making the more reverent tread usually taken by British orchestras seem limp-wristed. This is a sensationally invigorating recording.

Fabrice Fitch

Leroux *Quid sit musicus? Cinq Poèmes de Jean Grosjean* **Machaut** *Inviolata genitrix. Ma fin est mon commencement. Sans cuer*
Senlèches *La harpe de mélodie*
Ensemble Solistes XXI / **Rachid Safir**
 Soupir Editions (F) S228 (1/16)

Passing over *Gramophone* Award-winners and runners-up as is my habit on this occasion, I pick Philippe Leroux's *Quid sit*

musicus?, a multi-movement cycle incorporating 14th-century music intelligently and without resort to pastiche or (with apologies to Cage) 'cheap imitation'. Ensemble Solistes XXI under Rachid Safir are committed and sympathetic interpreters.



'Tetzlaff's Brahms is one of those rare discs that's given me fresh appreciation for old friends' — Andrew Farach-Colton

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Mozart 'The Weber Sisters'
Sabine Devieille *sop*
Pygmalion / **Raphaël Pichon**
 Erato (F) 2564 60758-4 (11/15)



A magical concept, fastidious programming and superlative execution converge effortlessly in this profoundly satisfying recital. Sabine Devieille is the most ravishing 'trio' of Weber sisters. Sweet and tactile instrumental accompaniments contribute memorably to a project oozing sensuality, drama, imagination and wit.



Charlotte Gardner

Haydn, Schubert & Brahms Music for Cello and Piano

Stéphane Tétéreault *vc* **Marie-Ève Scarfone** *pf*

Analekta © AN2 9994 (2/16)



What a delightful discovery this disc was; an unflashy cover, and a young cellist whose name was completely unknown to me. Yet after no more than four bars Tétéreault had my full attention, so charmed was I by his elegance, lyricism, and faithful yet personality-filled readings. Beautiful partnering from Scarfone, too.

'Alan Gilbert's collection of recent Christopher Rouse projects the differently anguished emotions of our own time' — David Gutman

Caroline Gill

Couperin Leçons de Ténèbres **Brossard** Stabat mater

La Nuova Musica / **David Bates**

Harmonia Mundi © HMU80 7659 (10/16)



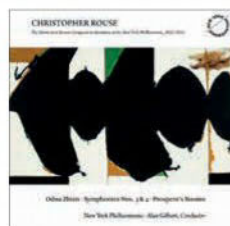
Most enticing about La Nuova Musica is the sense that their performances are born of a marriage of equals – music-making as collaboration not dictatorship. With this recording it results in a perfect balance of a surprising but clever combination of voices, dramatic but pure delivery, and a simple but musically substantial programme.

David Gutman

Rouse Symphonies Nos 3 and 4. Odná Zhizn. Prospero's Rooms

New York Philharmonic Orchestra / **Alan Gilbert**

Dacapo © 8 226110 (8/16)



Rivalling the eloquence of Thomas Dausgaard's superb Seattle account of Mahler's 'Tenth' (A/16), Alan Gilbert's New York Philharmonic collection of recent Christopher Rouse projects the differently anguished emotions of our own time. Rouse's Third Symphony finds inspiration in Prokofiev's Second while the Fourth posits Tippett-like

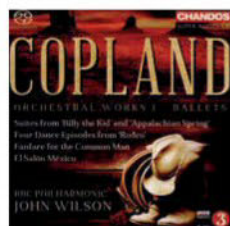
rapture before imploding into hollowed-out inertia.

Christian Hoskins

Copland Orchestral works, Vol 1 – Ballets

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / **John Wilson**

Chandos © CHSA5164 (3/16)



Few recordings have given me more pleasure than the first instalment of John Wilson's series of Aaron Copland's orchestral works for Chandos, superbly realised performances of the three most popular ballet suites (*Appalachian Spring*, *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*) as well as *El Salón México* and *Fanfare for the Common Man*.

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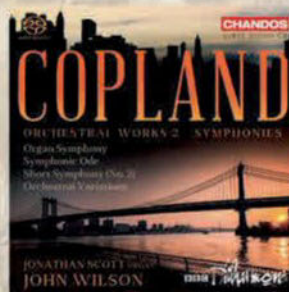


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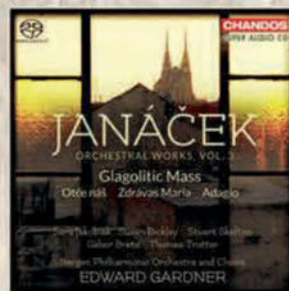
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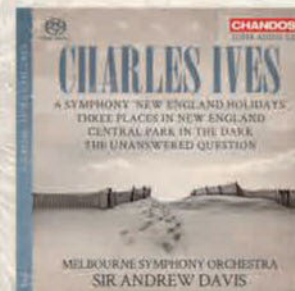
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Lindsay Kemp

Dowland *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares*. **Phantasm** with **Elizabeth Kenny** lute
Linn ⑤ CKD527 (8/16)

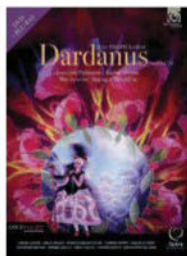
An English classic was my favourite of 2016: Phantasm's performances of Dowland's complete *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares* collection delight in some of the best

tunes of the 1600s, but also dig deep into the complex psyche of its melancholy composer, revealing Dowland's richness, changeability and exquisite musical subtlety.



Richard Lawrence

Rameau *Dardanus*
Soloists; Pygmalion / Raphaël Pichon
Harmonia Mundi ⑤ + DVD
HMD985 9051/2 (10/16)



Despite recent productions at ENO and Glyndebourne, Rameau's operas haven't made much headway over here. Is it the very French combination of song and dance that puts producers off? Ignore the plot weaknesses and surrender to this gorgeous staging from Bordeaux: you will be humming 'Paix favorable' for a week.

Bryce Morrison

'Complete Chopin Recordings'
Martha Argerich pf
DG ⑤ 479 6068 (9/16)

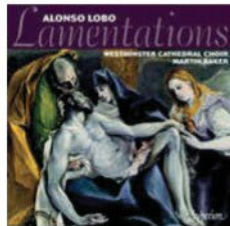


With outside reissue tributes to pianists as stellar as Alfred Brendel, Martha Argerich and Maria-João Pires a first choice becomes a near impossibility.

Yet if forced to choose it would be Argerich's five-CD set for DG. Here, her flame-throwing virtuosity combines with an acute sensitivity to recreate all of Chopin's genius.

Andrew Mellor

Lobo *Lamentations* etc
Choir of Westminster Cathedral / Martin Baker
Hyperion ⑤ CDA68106 (7/16)



Alonso Lobo's *Lamentations* represent Iberian polyphony at its most tender and scented. I got to know the piece via John Eliot Gardiner's tight recording from almost a decade ago (6/05); this newcomer has all the expanse of Westminster Cathedral itself, unfolding as if in vaulted paragraphs. Awesome!

Hannah Nepil

Clarke *Works for Viola*
Duo Rùnya
Aveva ⑤ AE16008 (5/16)



Rebecca Clarke's music has found committed champions in the Italian sisters, Diana and Arianna Bonatesta, who relish its dreaming lyricism, its uncompromising grasp of structure and, most of all, its sheer intensity. The result is a passionate tribute to this neglected composer.

Philip Kennicott

Mozart 225: The New Complete Edition
Decca (200 discs) 483 0000 (10/16)



'Mozart 225' is a hefty investment, and much of its material has been issued before, yet I enjoyed this listening experience more than any

other single release of the past year. Expert scholarship, an engaging new biography, elegant presentation and impeccable recordings make this far more than an exercise in luxury packaging. It is a reassessment of Mozart and his role in our current moment of music history, and proof of the persistent vitality of his legacy.

Ivan Moody

Harvey DEO
Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha
Signum ⑤ SGCD456 (7/16)



This is a dazzling, confident disc of some very challenging music. Jonathan Harvey's church music is certainly difficult, but the results are

rewarding indeed. St John's here turn in outstanding performances of music that should be far better known, complemented by two positively riotous organ pieces performed by Edward Picton-Turbervill.

Jeremy Nicholas

Romantic Piano Concertos
Various artists
Brilliant Classics ⑤ (40 discs)
95300BR (8/16)

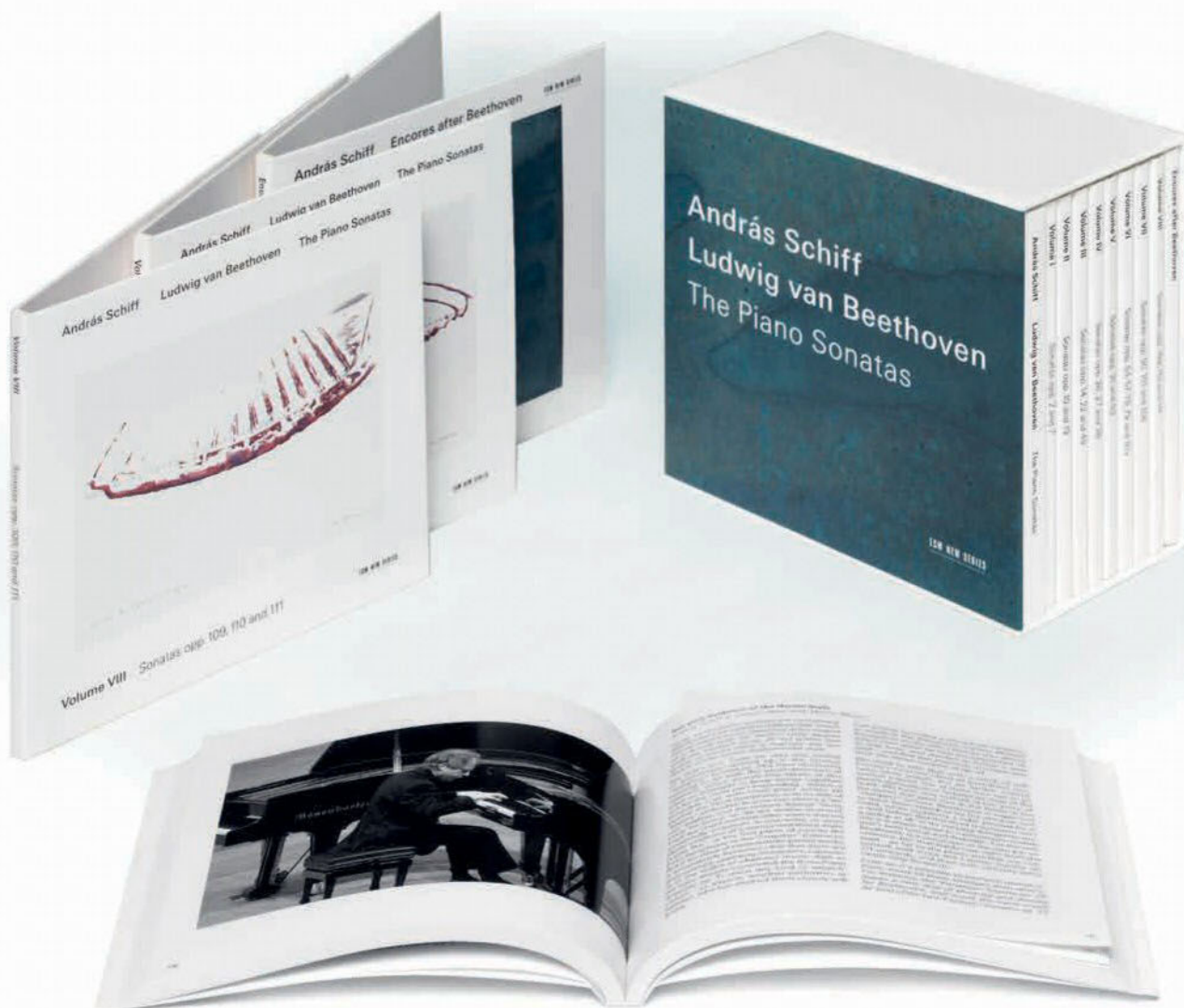


The newly unearthed Moszkowski Piano Concerto (7/16) and Leonidas Kavakos and Enrico Pace's 'Virtuoso' recital (6/16) were the stand-out new discs

of the year but what gave me more pleasure than anything else was a 40-CD box-set of reissues: '60 Romantic Piano Concertos'.

Sir András Schiff Ludwig van Beethoven The Piano Sonatas

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This specially-priced 11-CD edition contains the Complete Piano Sonatas by Beethoven, recorded live in concert at the Tonhalle in Zürich. The box includes an additional CD of encores from these concerts with works by Schubert, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Bach, plus an extensive booklet, which re-collects all original conversations around the sonatas, and adds an insightful new text by András Schiff reflecting upon the 'Encores after Beethoven'. 11-CD Box 481 2908

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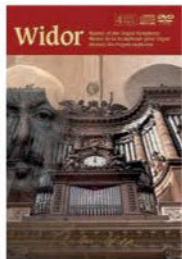
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Christopher Nickol

Widor 'Master of the Organ Symphony'
Various organists

Fugue State Films (F) ④ (two CDs and two DVDs) FSFVD010 (2/16)



This is a worthy successor to 'The Genius of Cavaillé-Coll' – my 2013 Critics' Choice. The performances, all by organists on historic French instruments, are a constant delight. The documentary, covering

Widor's career as organist, composer, writer and administrator, shows that he achieved so much more than *that* Toccata!

Mark Pullinger

Tchaikovsky Symphonies Nos 1, 2 & 5
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

Onyx (M) ② ONYX4150 (8/16)



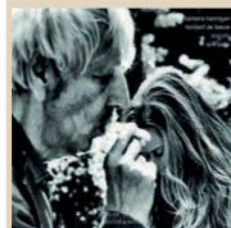
Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra make a splendid start to their Onyx Tchaikovsky cycle. *Winter Daydreams* is a

bracing troika ride through the snow, the *Little Russian* is boisterous and bombastic, while the Fifth is impassioned. There's a lot of competition, but this should be a cycle worth following.

Peter Quantrill

Satie Socrate

Barbara Hannigan sop Reinbert de Leeuw pf
Winter & Winter (F) 910 234-2 (6/16)



With the Award-winning disc of Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* and de Leeuw's Proms *Der nächtliche Wanderer*, Hannigan and de Leeuw, here

as pianist, brought their individual rays of sunshine to a dismal year. Here they unite in a coolly sensuous recording that finally makes sense of *Socrate*. In a three-way meeting of strange and powerful gifts.

Geoffrey Norris

Scarlatti 18 Sonatas

Yevgeny Sudbin pf

BIS (F) BIS2138 (4/16)



Yevgeny Sudbin's Scarlatti is a thing of wonder, as he shows again – 11 years after his first collection for BIS – in this astute celebration of the composer's rich fund of fresh, stimulating ideas. Sudbin's art is to think deeply about the music's expressive implications and then allow Scarlatti's imagination to ignite his own. The result is spellbinding.

Guy Rickards

Gál Piano Concerto, Op 57^a

Mozart Piano Concerto No 22 in E flat, K482

Sarah Beth Briggs pf

Royal Northern Sinfonia / *Kenneth Woods
Avie (F) CDAV2358 (7/16)



If I have had a relatively quiet year it has not been light on quality. Two issues stand out: Christian Lindberg's searing account of Allan Pettersson's

Symphony No 13 (1/16) and Sarah Beth Briggs's beautifully poised, enchanting accounts of piano concertos by Hans Gál and Mozart. The concertos have it.

Richard Osborne

Beethoven Missa solemnis

Soloists; Arnold Schoenberg Choir; Concentus

Musicus Wien / Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Sony Classical (M) ② 88985 31359-2 (8/16)



This annual retrospective gave me the cue one Sunday morning to revisit Harnoncourt's late-gathered account of

Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. An unusually meditative reading yet one illuminated and propelled by its own profound sense of spiritual wonder, it is an apt memorial to a great musician.

Malcolm Riley

Widor 'Master of the Organ Symphony'
Various organists

Fugue State Films (F) ④ (two CDs and two DVDs) FSFVD010 (2/16)



This year, pride of place on my DVD shelf has been given to the crowd-funded Fugue State Films magnum opus on the organ music of Charles-Marie Widor. The seven-and-a-half

hours of combined video and audio content are crowned by superlative performances of the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies by Gerard Brooks.

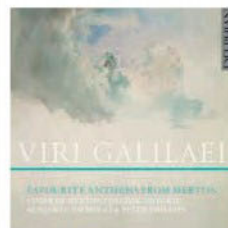
Marc Rochester

'Viri Galilaei' Favourite Anthems from Merton
Choir of Merton College, Oxford / Benjamin

Nicholas & Peter Phillips with Charles

Warren & Peter Shepherd org

Delphian (F) DCD34174 (4/16)



Whenever William Harris's glorious eight-part anthem *Faire is the Heaven* gets an airing, I'm there to wallow in its opulence. This performance is

sumptuous enough to keep me satisfied for the entire year, but I also get a whole lot more in what the disc suggests are, 'favourite anthems from Merton'. Parry, Quilter, Byrd, Morley. Ah! This fayre is truly heavenly.





Patrick Rucker

'Dedication' Chopin Etudes, Op 10 Nos 10 and 12

Liszt Piano Sonata Schumann Kreisleriana

Nicolas Angelich *pf*

Erato 019029 599067-1 (7/16)



The 2016 recording I've returned to most often, with undiminished pleasure, is Nicolas Angelich's 'Dedication'. Despite the magnificence of this rhetorically apt Liszt Sonata and the sheer effortless beauty of the two Chopin études, it's the haunting *Kreisleriana* that has captured my imagination and won't let go. I'm hooked.

Hugo Shirley

Zandonai Francesca da Rimini

Soloists; Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra /

Fabrice Bollon

CPO 02 CPO777 960-2 (1/16)



For me, this recording was a revelation. I'd enjoyed Zandonai's dark, ominous and weighty Dante opera in the past, but never realised quite how seductive it was. Fabrice Bollon avoids bombast and underlines

beauty in a recording that is also extremely well sung by its excellent if largely unknown cast.



Edward Seckerson

Elgar Symphony No 1

Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

Decca 019029 599067-1 (5/16)



Barenboim's long-evolving symbiosis with Elgar's music – and this symphony in particular – is effortlessly communicated to his wonderful Berlin orchestra. Intuition and spontaneity belies unfamiliarity and Elgar's very particular brand of *Sturm und Drang* and his deep and abiding nostalgia for happier times is thrillingly, and luminously, conveyed.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Henderickx At the Edge of the World.

Empty Mind. Groove!

Flemish PO / Martyn Brabbins

RFP 02 RFP011 (6/16)



This two-disc set, featuring three works by Wim Henderickx, provides an excellent introduction to his music. His Symphony No 1 is an architectural tour de force, bursting into vibrant life before an explosive climax. The rhythmically propulsive *Groove!*, featuring the impressive Pieterjan Vranckx on percussion, is more direct but equally as effective. Powerful stuff.



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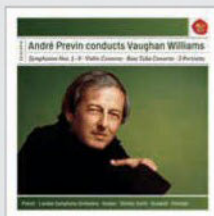
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Harriet Smith

Beethoven Piano Sonatas, Opp 90, 101 & 106
Steven Osborne pf
 Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68073 (10/16)

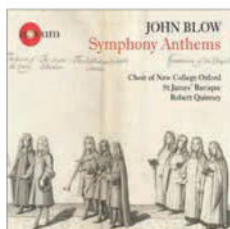


I was halfway through writing up Alice Coote's wonderfully fragile 'L'heure exquise' album (6/15) when I unwrapped

Steven Osborne's *Hammerklavier* Sonata. Raw, dangerous, profound – this is a true marriage of daring and conviction. It says much for his readings of Opp 90 and 101 that they are in no way overshadowed by the mighty *Hammerklavier*.

David Vickers

Blow Symphony Anthems
Choir of New College, Oxford;
St James' Baroque / Robert Quinney
 Novum Ⓢ NCR1389 (9/16)



With the exception of the masque *Venus and Adonis* (Purcell's model for *Dido and Aeneas*), recordings of Blow's music are much too rare.

An auspicious debut for Robert Quinney at the helm of New College's famous choir, this assortment of six symphony anthems is easily the most splendid recording of its kind in years.

David Patrick Stearns

Schnittke Twelve Penitential Psalms, etc
RIAS Chamber Choir / Hans-Christoph Rademann
 Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMC90 2225 (5/16)

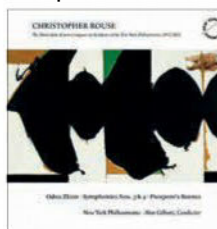


Explosive, violent and macabre, Alfred Schnittke's works were the biggest cultural revelation of post-Communist

Russia, though these 1988 *Penitential Psalms*, showing the composer in a more traditional framework, are aging much better. The polytonal text settings arrive from a bottomless well of Russian spirituality, ending with nine minutes of eloquent humming.

Richard Whitehouse

Rouse Symphonies Nos 3 and 4. Odná Zhizn.
 Prospero's Rooms
New York PO / Alan Gilbert
 Dacapo Ⓢ 8 226110 (8/16)



Christopher Rouse reinforces his pre-eminence among living American symphonists with his Third and Fourth Symphonies:

the former a bracingly ingenious take on Prokofiev's Second Symphony; the latter oblique yet provocative in manner. Excellent performances by the NYPO, in the sure highlight of their association with Dacapo.

David Threasher

Haydn Symphonies Nos 78-81
Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
 Decca Ⓢ ② 478 8837DH2 (3/16)



Having watched and waited for years as period-instrument Haydn cycles stuttered to life then withered away, it's fantastic that, at last, Decca has taken

the initiative and created a composite set (reviewed last month). Christopher Hogwood and Frans Brüggen are known quantities; but who better than Ottavio Dantone and Accademia Bizantina to record the final four for the cycle?

Arnold Whittall

'Scherben' Works by Harvey, Nunes, Poppe and Saariaho
Ensemble Musikfabrik /
Stefan Asbury, Sian Edwards,
Emilio Pomarico & Peter Rundel
 Wergo Ⓢ WER6862-2 (4/16)

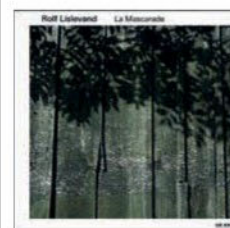


A cutting-edge contemporary programme puts leading British modernist Jonathan Harvey alongside composers from Finland,

Germany and Portugal. The result is a celebration of Euro-diversity, across an expressive spectrum from the lighthearted (Poppe) to the mystically serious (Nunes). Uniformly excellent performances, recorded with the highest fidelity to unusually refined instrumental textures.

William Yeoman

Corbetta. Visée 'La Mascarade'
Rolf Lislevand baroque gtr/theorbo
 ECM New Series Ⓢ 481 1716 (8/16)



One of our greatest poets of the theorbo and Baroque guitar, Rolf Lislevand here contrasts the sounds of both

instruments, the styles of two of their finest composers – Francesco Corbetta and Robert de Visée – and his own improvised music with theirs. The result is not only a muted evocation of lost worlds, but a suggestion of those still waiting to be discovered. Utterly exquisite.

Richard Wignmore

'Kennst du das Land?'
Wolf Lieder to texts by Goethe, Mörike and Eichendorff
Sophie Karthäuser sop **Eugene Asti** pf
 Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ HMC90 2245 (8/16)



Abetted by the ever-perceptive Eugene Asti, Belgian soprano Sophie Karthäuser delights with her vernal tone and unforced sense of

character in this all-Wolf recital. She delivers the lighter songs with charm, grace and an impish sense of fun, and brings a mingled innocence and pathos to the songs of loss and betrayal. Her 'Das verlassene Mägdelein' and 'An eine Äolsharfe' are as moving as any I know.





Song of Nativity: The Sixteen explore the full spectrum of Christmas choral music

HARK!

The Christmas choirs sing

Andrew Mellor listens to this year's most interesting seasonal offerings, from The Sixteen and The King's Singers to the Bolshoi Theatre Children's Choir

It is a pity that in recent years arrangements of well-known carols have become so elaborate, to the extent that they almost obscure a well-loved tune.' So writes Harry Christophers in the booklet to The Sixteen's 'Song of the Nativity', and his comment crystallises one of the eternal arguments about how a 'carol' should treat the ears of its listeners. But The Sixteen's recording offers both apt and frustrating answers to the question of just what we should expect from new choral music, even at Christmas. Clearly, making an original yet festive Christmas carol CD – for want of a better descriptor – is harder than it would seem. This year's crop might contain some gems but in general terms it proves the point.

Issues of composition aside for the moment, one element uniting each offering here is that none includes congregational singing, which in actual Christmas liturgies often proves a necessarily communal counterpoint to the more intricate choir-only works. Any choir making a CD of traditional carols without a rent-a-crowd of unison singers needs to deal cannily with the resulting lack of majesty and oomph.

The Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea short-circuits that issue with a bijou collection – **Carols from Chelsea** – that goes big on understatement. This ensemble has some first-class personnel and it's the tension and subtlety in the performances that catch the ear. Adolph Adam's *O holy night* throbs and Helen Ashby's solo in Harold Darke's *In the bleak midwinter* is, like much of the singing, beautifully considered. Chelsea Pensioner George Hatton is no Bing Crosby (he's more of a Feodor Chaliapin, in fact) but his cameo in Irving Berlin's 'White Christmas' movingly underscores the choir's *raison d'être*.

Perhaps the reigned-in approach has one casualty in a frustratingly cool rendition of John Gardner's 1965 *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* – one of those modern carols that solves any aesthetic problems with unfettered ease.

The Chelsea singers de-camped to the Temple Church to cut their disc but another London chapel choir, that of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal, stayed at home for **Adeste Fideles**. The tight acoustic space of the chapel at St James's Palace works well for the piquant organ bedrock of the *Sussex*



The carolling Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea

Carol (David Willcocks), *Sans Day Carol* (John Rutter) and for Malcolm Sargent's rarely heard Spiritual arrangements. But the small space also underlines the idiosyncrasies of the equally small ensemble: with just 11 trebles, the top line isn't the purest; one of the basses sings consistently under the note and *Three kings from Persian lands* (Cornelius arr Atkins) is marred by soloist Maciek O'Shea's wayward vibrato. As for the beefy carol-hymns including *Adeste fideles* (apparently traceable as a work to this very ensemble), they lack impact.

This choir's leadership has included Byrd, Purcell and Handel, and the inclusion of music by two of their successors highlights the treacherous difficulty of writing original Christmas music that will last: Richard Popplewell's *Blessed Jesu! Here we stand* isn't going to change the world but is an example of effective, clear, joyous carol writing; Andrew Gant's arrangement of *We wish you a merry Christmas* is more of a pile-up, sometimes lacking in clarity and often plain crude.

Both those pieces, however, have the unmistakeable gait of a carol. But what exactly does that mean? There are plenty of hard, contextual and fearlessly contemporary answers in Alexandra Coghlan's examination of Yuletide music's DNA, **Carols from Kings: the stories of our favourite carols from King's College**, and some indispensable commentary in the book's final chapters on the establishment of the King's carol service and its legacy for contemporary composition. Few institutions have done more than King's to foster new music but as Coghlan reveals, the commissioning of carols from genuinely original composers is a risky business.

For that reason I was intrigued by Kantorei Kansas City's **To Bethlehem**, which combines 16th-century discoveries – the best of them by Blasius Ammon (1558-90) – with new works. The disc starts promisingly, with David Basden's concise *Alleluia! O virga mediatrix*, a tense realisation of *O come, O come Emmanuel* from Jocelyn Hagen and two more subtle arrangements of known tunes by Matthew Culloton. But we soon slip into a series of works by R Douglas Helvering, Ivo Antognini and Kim André Arnesen that are neither innovative nor carol-like and seem determined to re-hash ideas formulated long, long ago – and



Kantorei of Kansas City and their director Chris Munce record 'To Bethlehem'

with rather more conviction – by Morten Lauridsen. The professional choir sings well despite an occasionally unpleasant edge in the tenor section and is beautifully recorded. But if the aim is to 'educate audiences' as the ensemble claims, then those audiences will emerge with the skewed notion that all contemporary American choral music is founded on the same derivative language of warm-bath chromatic harmonies that lead nowhere.

Speaking of Christmas

music's uneasy relationship with the avant-garde, it's a sign of how classy and successful a programme has been compiled by Andrew Nethsingha and the Choir of St John's College, Cambridge that Michael Finnis's *John the Baptist* fits so well into the weave of **Christmas with St John's**. They choose the right (as in, least naff) Bob Chilcott works and invest John Rutter's

Dormi Jesu with the throbbing glow for which this ensemble and its acoustic is famous. The musical language of *People, look East* (Tranchell arr Mark Blatchly) is fascinating but we get a glimpse of Harry

Christophers's complaint in William Whitehead's *The seven joys of Mary* which seems intent on reinventing the wheel. At the last, Gardner's *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* rises where the Chelsea performance failed to.

'Christmas with St John's' also makes some vital points about choral stylistics, particularly when heard alongside **A**

Wells Christmas – a journey through Willcocks/Rutter arrangements with no hymn-carols (wise) and a couple of contemporary works that succeed because they focus on 'lullaby' as one of the three central tenets of the carol tradition (with, according to Rutter, as quoted by Coghlan, song and dance). Jefferson McConaughy's *In the bleak midwinter* is evocative and director of music Matthew Owens's *Lullay, my liking* distilled and touching.

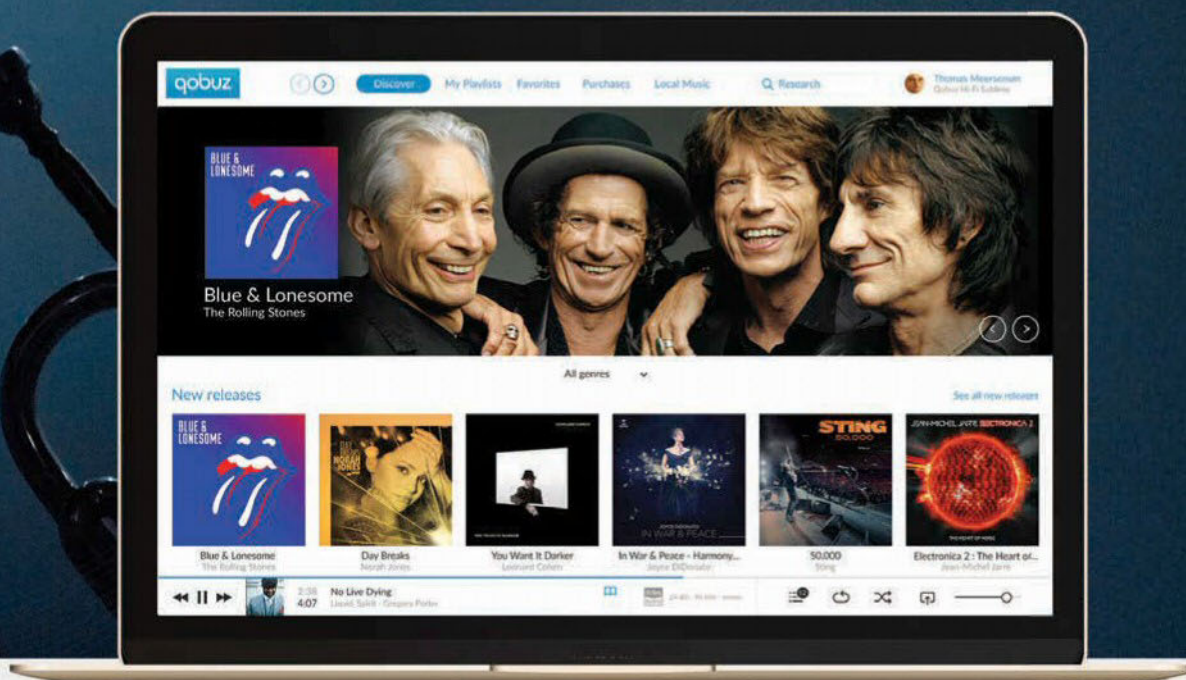
But 'A Wells Christmas' is dogged by some bizarrely mannered singing. Where the St John's choir have a non-dogmatic way of placing final consonants, the Wells choristers hugely over emphasise not just final consonants but vowels too ('earth stood hard as iron-er' / 'water like a stone-r') in a way that soon starts to irritate. There's also an uneasy blend between the pure and

'Making an original yet festive Christmas carol CD – for want of a better descriptor – is harder than it would seem'



The boy and girl choristers of Wells Cathedral Choir

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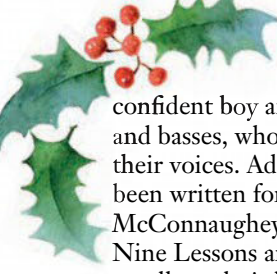
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confident boy and girl choristers and the often raucous tenors and basses, who take every opportunity to prove the size of their voices. Add to that a booklet essay that appears to have been written for a different project (no word on who Jefferson McConnaughey is, for example, but we get plenty on the Nine Lessons and Carols tradition), and I'm afraid this usually excellent choir has delivered a Christmas turkey.

On the subject of Nine Lessons and Carols, a choir of young and adolescent boys from Germany, Neuer Knabenchor Hamburg, has paid its own intriguing homage to the service with **A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols** which does what it says on the tin (but with 17 carols). Again, there's no congregation, and no organ either, to warm-up *Hark! the herald* or *O come all ye faithful*; that, and the lessons (read in German) have been recorded in a dry radio studio rather than the resonant St Gertrud's Church in Hamburg where the music comes from. There are some odd tempo decisions (a speedy *Silent Night* and a lethargic *God rest you merry, gentlemen*) but it's fascinating to hear such staples as Boris Ord's *Adam lay ybounden* rendered in an open-throated continental style.

Likewise, the children's choir of the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, which sings with all the confidence you might expect but with surprising purity too on the album **Christmas Bells**. We hear a forthright performance of Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* before the album drifts into a curious hotch-potch of Franck and Mozart, finally coming to rest on *Jingle Bells* and *Stille Nacht*. A strange beast, but there is much professionalism here.

Professionalism is the name of the game on the Hallé's **A Christmas Celebration**, even if the vast majority of the performers involved come from the orchestra's remarkable pyramid of amateur choral ensembles. The whole enterprise is slick (Nigel Hess's *A Christmas Overture* and Richard Bissill's *A Christmas Carnival* have plenty of cinematic wonder and orchestral sparkle) but deeply touching, exuding the warm glow that the Hallé 'family' emits over Manchester at this time of year. Even with massed singers, the agile performance of John Gardner's *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* gets tantalisingly close to the perfect recording I've been attempting to seek out for decades. And it's great to properly hear The Bridgewater Hall's distinctive Marcussen organ, too, in Roderick Elms's madcap Yule-themed concerto *Noël!*.

Hess and Bissill know how to use an orchestra with breadth and imagination to deliver something magical; the basic musical language might be off-the-shelf but it's a particularly high shelf that not every composer can reach. And so we come back to the question of composition, as posed by The Sixteen's **Song of the Nativity**. First things first, it's as well sung as you'd expect with none of the bizarre proto-professional diction we hear from Wells but a connection with the texts that runs deeper (look no further than Peter Warlock's *Bethlehem Down*).

And the repertoire? We have the full spectrum: from ideological composers clever enough to see when and how their ideologies might work within the Christmas tradition (Skempton's *Adam lay ybounden*) to those taking basic carolling principles as their guiding lights (Cecilia MacDowall's *Now may we sing*, Bob Chilcott's stunning *Shepherd's Carol*) to those with a strong enough voice and conviction to seize both the text and the ears (James MacMillan's *O radiant dawn*) to stuck-in-a-rut writing that's part of a new, neo-impressionistic school of church music composition that wants to deny Kenneth Leighton or William Mathias ever existed (Will Todd's *My lord has come*). Traditional Christmas folk songs are neatly woven in between. Perhaps that comprehensiveness, without any of the obscuring arrangements to which Christophers refers to


in his introduction, is the nearest we get to a complete survey of choral art music for Christmas from the modern era – warts and all.




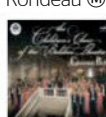




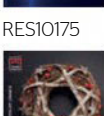



But hold on just one second...because both The King's Men and The King's Singers are on hand to remind us what Christmas sounds like in the real world. The latter have produced an album of arrangements – **Christmas Songbook** – inspired by the rat-pack footling of their 'Great American Songbook' (2013). The harmonies are of the boater-and-blazer variety and the arrangements are often mind-bogglingly complex; *It came upon a midnight clear* is an exhausting listen, determined to do something spectacular in nearly every bar. The dry studio sound can prove arid and soulless too, but the execution is as spotless as you'd expect.

Not taking itself quite so seriously is **Twelve Days of Christmas** from The King's Men (the altos, tenors and basses of King's College). Among the classic pop tracks and scattering of traditional carols in louche but careful arrangements, the highlight has to be Ben Parry's rendering of Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas'; it's a mark of how broad this choir's talents are right now that alto soloist Patrick Dunachie has all the funk to pull it off without any sense of cultural appropriation. The disc has all the cosiness and geekiness of a garish Christmas jumper. I wouldn't want to be caught listening when my eligible neighbour pops down to borrow a corkscrew, but I have a feeling this will be playing while I peel the sprouts on Christmas morning. **G**

THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to the festive season's recordings



| | |
|---|---|
|  <p>Carols from Chelsea The Chapel Choir of the Royal Hospital Chelsea / William Vann Somm (E) SOMMCD0161</p> |  <p>A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols Neuer Knabenchor Hamburg / Jens Bauditz Rondeau (M) ROP6125</p> |
|  <p>Adeste Fideles Choir of Her Majesty's Chapel Royal / Huw Williams Signum (E) SIGCD460</p> |  <p>Christmas Bells The Children's Choir of the Bolshoi Theatre / Yulia Molchanova Melodiya (E) MELCD100 2357</p> |
|  <p>Carols from King's Alexandra Coghlan BBC Books, HB, 224 pp, £9.99 ISBN: 978-1-78-594094-1</p> |  <p>A Christmas Celebration Hallé Choirs and Orchestra / Stephen Bell Hallé (E) CDHLL7545</p> |
|  <p>To Bethlehem Kantorei of Kansas City / Chris Munce Resonus (E) RES10175</p> |  <p>Song of the Nativity The Sixteen / Harry Christophers Coro (E) COR16146</p> |
|  <p>Christmas with St John's St John's College Choir / Andrew Nethsingha Signum (E) SIGCD458</p> |  <p>Christmas Songbook The King's Singers Signum (E) SIGCD459</p> |
|  <p>A Wells Christmas Wells Cathedral Choir / Matthew Owens Resonus (E) RES10176</p> |  <p>Twelve Days of Christmas The King's Men King's College (E) KGS0017</p> |

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|-------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| ALESSANDRIA | Michele Pittaluga International Guitar and Composition for Classical Guitar Competitions “Premio Città di Alessandria” | MANCHESTER | James Mottram International Piano Competition |
| AUCKLAND | Michael Hill International Violin Competition | MARKNEUKIRCHEN | International Instrumental Competition |
| AUGSBURG | International Violin Competition Leopold Mozart | MELBOURNE | Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition |
| BANFF | Banff International String Quartet Competition | MIAMI | Murray Dranoff International Two Piano Competition |
| BARCELONA | «Maria Canals International Music Competition» | MONTRÉAL | Canadian International Organ Competition |
| BEIJING | Beijing International Music Competition | MONTRÉAL | Concours Musical International de Montréal |
| BELGRADE | International Jeunesses Musicales Competition | MONZA | International Piano Competition Rina Sala Gallo |
| BERLIN | International Max Rostal Competition | MOSCOW | International Tchaikovsky Competition |
| BERLIN | «Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann» | MUNICH /// | ARD International Music Competition |
| | International Cello Competition | NINGBO | China International Vocal Competition |
| BESANÇON | Concours International de Jeunes Chefs d'Orchestre | NORRKÖPING | Wilhelm Stenhammar International Music Competition |
| BILBAO | Concours International de Chant de Bilbao-Bizkaia «Pedro M ^a Unau» | ODENSE | Carl Nielsen International Music Competition |
| BOLZANO | Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition | ORLÉANS | Concours International de Piano d'Orléans |
| BONN | International Telekom Beethoven Competition | OSAKA | Osaka International Chamber Music Competition |
| BORDEAUX | Concours International de Quatuor à Cordes de Bordeaux | OSLO | The Queen Sonja International Music Competition |
| | J.N. Hummel International Piano Competition | PARIS /// | Concours Long-Thibaud |
| BRATISLAVA | International Violin Competition “Città di Brescia” | PARMA | “Fondazione Arturo Toscanini” |
| BRESCIA | Concours Musical International | | International Music Competitions |
| BRUXELLES /// | Reine Elisabeth de Belgique | PINEROLO | International Chamber Music Competition |
| BUCHAREST | George Enescu International Competition | | “Città di Pinerolo” |
| BUCHAREST | Le Grand Prix d'Opera International Singing Competition | PORCIA | Concours International “Città di Porcia” |
| | Budapest International Music Competition | POZNAN /// | Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition |
| BUDAPEST /// | Paderewski International Piano Competition | PRAGUE /// | Prague Spring International Music Competition |
| BYDGOSZCZ | Honens International Piano Competition | PRETORIA | Unisa International Music Competitions |
| CALGARY | Concours International d'Orgue | QINGDAO | China International Violin Competition |
| CHARTRES | «Grand Prix de Chartres» | REGGIO EMILIA | International String Quartet Competition |
| | Cleveland International Piano Competition | RIO DE JANEIRO | “Premio Paolo Borciani” |
| CLEVELAND | International Music Competitions Cologne | | BNDES International Piano Competition of Rio de Janeiro |
| COLOGNE | International Schubert Competition | ST. MAURICE | Concours International pour Orgue |
| DORTMUND | Dublin International Piano Competition | | Saint-Maurice d'Agaune |
| DUBLIN | Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition | ST. PETERSBURG | Elena Obraztsova International Competition |
| DUBLIN | “Aeolus” International Competition for Wind Instruments | | Of Young Opera Singers |
| DÜSSELDORF | Tromp International Percussion Competition | SALZBURG | International Mozart Competition |
| EINDHOVEN | Concours International de Piano d'Epinal | SANTANDER | Paloma O'Shea Santander International Piano Competition |
| EPINAL | Van Cliburn International Piano Competition | | Sendai International Music Competition |
| FORT WORTH | Concours de Genève | SENDAI | Seoul International Music Competition |
| GENEVA /// | International Violin Competition “Premio Paganini” | SEOUL | China Shenzhen International Piano Competition |
| GENOVA /// | Scottish International Piano Competition | SHENZHEN | Concours International de Violon |
| GLASGOW | International Competition | SION | «Tibor Varga» Sion Valais |
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| | Gaspar Cassado International Violoncello Competition | TAKAMATSU | The Takamatsu International Piano Competition |
| HACHIOJI | Hamamatsu International Piano Competition | TBILISI | Tbilisi International Piano Competition |
| HAMAMATSU | Mt. Fuji International Opera Competition of Shizuoka | TEL AVIV | The Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition |
| HAMAMATSU | Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition | | Concours International de Piano |
| HANNOVER | Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition | TERNI | “Alessandro Casagrande” |
| HELSINKI | Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition | THESSALONIKI | “Giorgos Thymis” International Piano Competition |
| HELSINKI | Jean Sibelius International Violin Competition | TOKYO | International Conducting Competition |
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| HONG KONG | Hong Kong International Piano Competition | TONGYEONG | Isang Yun International Music Competition |
| INDIANAPOLIS | International Violin Competition of Indianapolis | TOULOUSE | Concours International de Chant de la Ville de Toulouse |
| JAÉN | International Piano Competition “Premio Jaén” | | Top of the World International Piano Competition |
| JEJU | Jeju International Brass Competition | TROMSØ | Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition |
| KARUIZAWA | International Oboe Competition of Japan | TRONDHEIM | International Franz Liszt Piano Competition |
| KATOWICE | Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors | UTRECHT | Concours International de Piano «José Iturbi» |
| KATRINEHOLM | Swedish International Duo Competition | VALENCIA | Concours International de Musique |
| KIEV | International Competition for Young Pianists in memory of Vladimir Horowitz | VERCELLI /// | Gian Battista Viotti |
| KOBE | Kobe International Flute Competition | VEVEY | Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil |
| LEEDS | Leeds International Piano Competition | VIENNA | International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna |
| LEIPZIG | International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition | VIENNA | Fritz Kreisler International Violin Competition |
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MUSIC COMPETITIONS **GUIDE**

With an increasing number of music competitions now being streamed, it's not only first-class musicians who can participate. Our international guide includes information on how to enter, and also how to be in the audience – even if that's from the comfort of your sofa



Baritone James Newby: joint winner (with tenor Alessandro Fisher) of the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition in 2016

UK COMPETITIONS

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

Next competition: June 11-18, 2017

Nadine Koutcher of Belarus won the 2015 competition. Auditions for 2017 are now closed, and there's a £15,000 prize waiting for whoever gains the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World 2017 title. There will also be cash prizes for the other four finalists and for the Song Prize. The masterclasses will be streamed, Song Prize will feature in lunchtime concerts on BBC Radio 3, Radio Wales will give live round-ups each evening, BBC Four will broadcast rounds one to four and the Song Prize on the day after the actual concert, and the Final on the same day. All performances will be posted on the website, including music not broadcast on BBC Four.

Welsh language coverage takes place on S4C and Radio Cymru, and non-UK viewers will be able to access both the televised coverage and masterclasses.

bbc.co.uk

BBC Young Musician of the Year

Next competition: 2018

The biennial competition is open to string, percussion, woodwind, keyboard and brass players under 18, and carries a first prize of £2000, won in 2016 by cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason. Details on how to enter the 2018 competition will appear in Spring 2017.

bbc.co.uk

Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

Next competition: November or December 2018

Applications open December 2017

Established in 1990, this biennial competition aims to launch the careers of conductors aged under 35 from EU countries. The final is held in Barbican Hall, where the three finalists conduct the London Symphony Orchestra. Previous winners include Elim Chan, David Afkham and François-Xavier Roth. Details for the 2018 competition will appear on the website during 2017.

iso.co.uk/iso-discovery/donatella-flick-iso-conducting-competition

James Mottram International Piano Competition

Next competition: 2018

Applications: visit website for details
Held at the Royal Northern College of Music, this biennial competition is open to all pianists aged 18 to 30.

rncm.ac.uk/jmipc

The Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

Next competition:

April 26 & 28, 2017

Application forms are available online from November 2016

Applications close February 1, 2017

Held every April at Wigmore Hall, this competition is open to singers of all nationalities who have completed at least one year of study in the UK or Ireland. First prize is £12,500, second is £6,000 and there's a Song Prize of £5,000 and an Accompanist's Award. The semi-finals and finals take place before a public audience at the Wigmore. In 2016 the first prize was awarded to joint winners for only the second time in the competition's 61-year history: tenor Alessandro Fisher and baritone James Newby.

ferrierawards.org.uk

The Leeds International Piano Competition

Next competition: first rounds in Berlin, New York and Singapore, April 2018; semi-finals and finals in Leeds, September 2018

Applications open September 2017

Under the new joint artistic direction of Paul Lewis and Adam Gatehouse, the competition is looking very exciting indeed. Recent innovations are a new-concept portfolio prize which, in addition to a rich cash prize, sees Askonas Holt offering management to one of the prize-winners. There will also be an enhanced partnership with BBC Radio 3 offering concert and recording possibilities to the winner, a debut recording with the Champs Hill label, and engagements with leading international promoters, festivals and orchestras including London's Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Paul Lewis and other international pianists will offer a personal mentoring programme. Other innovations for 2018 include a new partnership with medic.tv to stream all the rounds internationally, a new chamber-music element in the semi-final, and first rounds taking place in Berlin, New York and Singapore. leedsplano.com

St Albans International Organ Competition

Next competition: July 10-22, 2017
Applications close March 24, 2017

Open to organists of all nationalities born after July 22, 1984, this competition under the artistic directorship of David Titterton offers a first prize of £6000, plus recital engagements in venues such as St Alban's Cathedral, King's College, Cambridge, and Notre Dame, Paris. There's also an improvisation competition, and for 2017 the Peter Hurford Bach prize becomes an independent round. The competition final is at St John's, Smith Square, with the Royal Academy of Music's Chamber Orchestra under Sian Edwards. Jury members include

Sophie-Véronique Cauchefeur-Choplin and David Goode. organfestival.com

Scottish International Piano Competition

Next competition:

September 1-10, 2017

Applications close March 31, 2017

Founded in 1986, this Glasgow-based triennial competition is one of the few major international piano competitions in the UK. Open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30, previous winners include Jonathan Fournel (2014), Oxana Shevchenko (2010) and Tom Poster (2007). The three finalists play a concerto with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, conducted by Thomas Søndergård, and the prize fund of £30,000 includes a first prize of £10,000 plus a concerto performance in the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's 2018-19 season. The early rounds will be streamed, and probably the final as well. scottishinternationalpiano.competition.com

Windsor Festival International String Competition

Next competition: March 12-18, 2017
Applications closed

This biennial competition, launched in 2008 as a tribute to Yehudi Menuhin, aims to seek out the exceptional string soloists of tomorrow. Based in Windsor, the final takes place in Windsor Castle's Waterloo Chamber, with prizes valued at over £20,000. The overall winner receives a solo recording opportunity with the competition's recording partner, Champs Hill Records, and returns the following September for a concerto performance with the competition's associate orchestra, The Philharmonia; there are also recital opportunities, a cash prize and bow prize, from bow partner, Bishop Instruments and Bows. On the panel of the international jury for 2017 are Pierre Amoyal, Alexander Zemtsov and Raphael Wallfisch. The rounds in Windsor will be streamed live on the competition website, via

a 360-degree camera enabling the worldwide audience to experience the competition in virtual reality. Interaction with contestants will also be possible: the semi-finalists' videos are uploaded onto the competition website together with a comments section for messages of support.

wfinternationalstringcompetition.com

York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

Next competition: July 12-15, 2017

Applications close January 17, 2017

Based at York's National Centre for Early Music, this biennial period-performance competition invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles of two or more musicians. The 2015 winners were the Sollazzo Ensemble, who have since gone on to record for Linn Records. First prize is £1000, a paid concert as part of the 2018 York Early Music Festival and a CD recording with Linn Records. Other prizes on offer are the York Early Music Festival Friends Prize, the Cambridge Early Music Prize and the Eemerging Project Prize of a place on the Emerging European Ensembles Programme (eemerging.eu). BBC Radio 3 records the competition and broadcasts highlights on *The Early Music Show*. It is also live-streamed. ncem.co.uk/youngartists2017

EUROPE**Aeolus International Competition for wind instruments**

Next competition: September 12-17, 2017; Applications close April 30, 2017

Based in Düsseldorf and open to all nationalities born on or after January 1, 1989, this year's disciplines are clarinet, flute and saxophone. Jury members for 2017 are flautist Emily Beynon, saxophonists Alain Crepin and Claude Delangle, and clarinettist Thorsten Johanns. First prize is €10,000 and a €3000 stipend to be used for concert performances to be arranged with the concert agency Jens

Gunnar Becker in Herdecke. There are also cash prizes and concert stipends for the second and third prizes, the Special Prize for the best interpretation of contemporary music, and a cash Audience Award. The prize-winner's concert will be recorded and broadcast by the radio station Deutschlandfunk. aeoluswettbewerb.de

ARD International Music Competition

Next competition: August 28 - September 15, 2017

Applications close March 31, 2017

Based in Munich, this is Germany's largest classical music competition, with a starry roster of high-profile previous winners including Jessye Norman, Christoph Eschenbach and Mitsuko Uchida. It's open to musicians aged between 17 and 29 who are ready to launch an international career, and this year's categories are piano, violin, oboe and guitar. The cash prizes total €90,000, including a first prize of €10,000. There are also international concert engagements on offer, plus radio broadcasts at the ARD Broadcasting Union. The semi-finals, final and prize-winners' concerts will be streamed live on the competition's website as well as via Facebook Live on the BR Klassik Facebook channel. The Bayerischer Rundfunk will also broadcast the competition extensively through its various programmes. br.de/ard-music-competition

Basel Composition Competition

Next competition: February 16-19, 2017; Applications closed

Established in memory of the conductor and patron Paul Sacher, this brand new composition competition with a jury headed by Wolfgang Rihm is open to composers of all ages and nationalities, with a focus on chamber and symphony orchestra compositions. It's based at the Theater Basel, and offers cash prizes totaling 100,000 Swiss francs for the three winning works, which will be performed in three rounds by

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CONCOURS-BESANCON.COM

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Wind Quintet
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August 28 to
September 15, 2017

Application
deadline:
March 31,
2017

Piano Violin Viola Cello Double Bass Guitar

www.ard-musikwettbewerb.de



SALZBURG 2018

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February 2 – 15, 2018

String Quartet | Voice

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Application deadline: August 15, 2017



CONTACT

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E-Mail: mozartwettbewerb@moz.ac.at

www.uni-mozarteum.at/mozartwettbewerb

the Basel Chamber Orchestra and the Basel Symphony Orchestra. Streaming plans are yet to be finalised, but it is likely that all the concerts will be live-streamed on Facebook.

baselcompetition.com

Elena Obratzova International Competition of Young Opera Singers, Russia

Next competition:

July or August 2017

This competition in St Petersburg is open to male and female opera singers of any nationality.

obratzova.org

Epinal International Piano Competition

Next competition:

March 24 - April 2, 2017

Applications close February 15, 2017, or when there are 100 registered competitors

Open to pianists born between 1987 and 2002, this French competition was founded in 1970. For 2018 it will be presided over by the Italian pianist Maurizio Baglini, and there are cash prizes of €5000, €2000 and €1500 for the top three competitors, along with various additional prizes. Competition winners also benefit from concert engagements at festivals such as Epinal's Concerts Classiques and Franche-Comté's Salon de Musique. At this point we can confirm that local television station Vosges Télévision will broadcast the semi-finals.

concours-international-piano-epinal.org

Geneva International Music Competition

Next competition: November 26, 2017

Applications close May 4, 2017

Founded in 1939, this competition's disciplines rotate annually, and its list of laureates includes Martha Argerich, Emmanuel Pahud and Sir Georg Solti. Next year will be a composition prize for a work for traditional solo clarinet and orchestra, and is open to composers of all nationalities under 40. President of the jury is Mathias Pintscher, who is joined by Unsuk Chin, Xavier



Sergei Redkin: winner of the International Maj Lind Piano Competition in 2012

Dayer, Magnus Lindberg and Ichiro Nodaira. Cash prizes include a first prize of CHF 15,000 and a second prize of CHF 10,000. The winning work will be performed at the final of the 2018 Clarinet Competition. The competition final will be broadcast live on Radio Télévision Suisse and possibly on other networks. You can also find footage from the competition on YouTube and other social media.

concoursgeneve.ch

'Géza Anda' International Piano Competition, Switzerland

Next competition: June 2-12, 2018

Applications close January 31, 2018

Pianists will be competing for prizes including a first prize of CHF 30,000, second of CHF 20,000 and a third of CHF 10,000. There are also prizes of concert engagements and free artist management for three years. Finalists perform with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, and there will be video live-streaming of the rounds.

geza-anda.ch

Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition, Finland

Next Competition: August 8-31, 2017

Applications:

January 16 - April 24, 2017

Run by the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, the competition is open to pianists of all nationalities, born in or after 1987. Prizes include a first prize of €30,000,

a second of €25,000 and a third of €20,000, and the overall winner will perform a recital at the PianoEspoo festival. There's also a €1500 prize awarded for the best second-round performance of a newly commissioned work by Kaija Saariaho. The concerto round is performed with the Helsinki Philharmonic under Anna-Maria Hartig; the piano quintet rounds are with the Tempera Quartet and Uusi Helsinki -kvartetti.

majlindcompetition.fi

International Franz Liszt Piano Competition, Netherlands

Next competition:

October 8-21, 2017

Applications closed

This Utrecht-based competition is entirely devoted to the piano works of Franz Liszt and is open to pianists aged between 19 and 29. In addition to generous cash prizes, the three main prize-winners receive a career-development programme valued at over €300,000 consisting of an international concert tour, coaching and training opportunities, promotion support and up to three years of concert management. Innovations for 2017 include longer performances in the selection rounds, and a chamber-music round with violinist Barnabás Kelemen. Remote viewing and participation options are extensive; in addition to a website constantly updated

with new multimedia material, there is a Liszt Competition App which enables the audience to participate in the voting process. There are plans to stream all the 2017 international selection rounds from New York, Utrecht, Moscow and Tokyo on the competition's Facebook page, as well as the actual competition in Utrecht. The organisers are also investigating broadcasting parts of the October competition in virtual reality.

liszt.nl

The International Instrumental Competition Markneukirchen

Next competition: May 4-13, 2017

Applications close January 31, 2017

This annual competition alternates between string and wind instruments. The disciplines for 2017 are viola and double bass. Cash prizes for each discipline are €5000, €3500 and €2500, along with a subsequent support programme including concert engagements and vouchers for sheet music. In 2017, the finalists will perform with the Vogtland Philharmonie Greiz Reichenbach.

instrumental-competition.de

International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition

Next competition: July 11-18, 2018

Applications: the competition

brochure is published June 2017

Previous prize-winners in this biennial Leipzig-based period-performance competition include cellist Philip Higham (2008). The categories for 2018 are piano, harpsichord, and violin/Baroque violin, and competition participants must have been born after July 21, 1985.

bachwettbewerbbleipzig.de

Maria Canals International Music Competition

Next competition:

March 25 - April 6, 2017

Applications closed

Founded in 1954 and held at Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana, this annual competition is aimed at performers of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30.

Disciplines rotate, and 2018 is open to pianists, who will compete for €70,000 in cash prizes, plus over 30 paid recitals and concert opportunities with orchestras around the world. Competition events are broadcast live online, and videos of each round are available on the website within hours after each session. The Catalan classical music radio station, Catalunya Música, broadcasts the final, live.
maricanals.org

International Mozart Competition Salzburg

Next competition:

February 2-8, 2018

The works of Mozart are at the heart of this biennial competition, and 2018's disciplines are string quartet and voice. Chairing the string quartet jury is Lukas Hagen, while Barbara Bonney chairs the vocal jury. String-quartet cash prizes on offer include a first prize of €20,000, second prize of €12,000 and third of €8000, while the top three vocal prizes are for €15,000, €10,000 and €5000.

uni-mozarteum.at

International Music Competition Cologne

Next competition:

November 27 - December 2, 2017

Applications close July 1, 2017

This triennial competition is organised by Cologne College of Music and Dance in co-operation with the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR). The 2017 competition is open to singers aged under 30 on November 27, 2017. The top three receive prizes of €10,000, €6000 and €3000. In addition, the overall winner is offered performances, including one with the WDR Funkhausorchester, with whom candidates perform in the final.
imwk.hfmt-koeln.de

International Percussion Composition Competition, Luxembourg

Next competition:

February 10-18, 2018

Applications close May 15, 2017

The competition is open to

composers of any nationality and age, and this time around is asking for a new seven- to eight-minute work written for percussion duo. The winning composer receives €2,500.
ipcl.lu

International String Quartet Premio Paolo Borciani Competition

Next competition: June 4-11, 2017

Applications close February 3, 2017

Established in 1987 and based in Reggio Emilia's Teatro Municipale Romolo Valli, this triennial competition is open to string quartets of all nationalities, the total age of their members not exceeding 128 on June 3, 2017. Previous winners include the Artemis Quartet (1997), the Pavel Haas Quartet (2005) and the Keller Quartet (1990). Part of the first prize is a tour of Europe, the United States and Japan. Each year's repertoire includes a contemporary work, either specially commissioned or existing, and for 2014 this was composed by Thomas Adès.
iteatri.re.it

International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch

Next competition:

September 7-16, 2017

Founded in 1954, this is the Netherlands' only classical vocal competition. It encompasses oratorio and art song as well as opera, with a particular focus on 20th century and contemporary music.

ivc.nu

International Telekom Beethoven Competition Bonn

Next competition:

December 1-9, 2017

Applications close May 15, 2017

Taking place biennially since 2005, this piano competition concentrates on the works of Beethoven from every phase of his creative life, along with the music of his predecessors, contemporaries and successors. The final focuses on Beethoven's piano concertos, supported by the Beethoven Orchester Bonn. Pavel Gililov chairs the jury this

year (as he has done since the competition began), and topping the cash prizes is a first prize of €30,000. Other prizes on offer include recital appearances and €2500 worth of sheet music from publishers G Henle. There will be high-quality live-streaming available worldwide through the competition website, courtesy of Deutsche Telekom AG, the sponsor of the competition.
telekom-beethoven-competition.de

International Competition for Young Pianists in Memory of Vladimir Horowitz, Kiev

Next competition: April 17-27, 2017

Applications close January 20, 2017

This Kiev-based piano competition is for pianists aged under 33, split between four age categories which rotate annually. Next year features the Senior category, covering pianists born between April 17, 1984, and April 17, 2001. The six prizes include a first prize of US\$20,000.

horowitzv.org

International Violin Competition Henri Marteau

Next competition:

April 24 - May 6, 2017

Applications close January 31, 2017

Founded in 2002, this triennial competition run by the Hofer Symphoniker takes place in Lichtenberg's Haus Marteau and the Freiheitshalle in Hof. It is open to violinists of any nationality born after May 5, 1992. It provides cash and non-cash awards and a subsequent support programme including scholarships, concert engagements and broadcasts with the competition's media partner, the Bayerischer Rundfunk, which also broadcasts the competition.

violinwettbewerb-marteau.de

Lyons International Chamber Music Competition

Next competition: April 19-23, 2017

Applications close January 15, 2017

Established in 2004, this chamber music competition focuses on a different instrumental grouping each

year. Last year was cello-and-piano duos and was won by the German Duo Urba. This year it's wind quintets, and there are €22,000 of cash prizes to be won, as well as concert engagements in venues such as Venice's Palazzetto Bru Zane, and broadcasting opportunities with Radio France Musique. Next year's semi-final will be broadcast live on the French specialist classical streaming platform, nomadmusic.fr, together with interviews with the contestants. The prize-winners' concert will be re-broadcast at a later date on France Musique.

cimcl.fr

Menuhin Competition

Next competition: April 12-22, 2018

Applications close October 2017

Previous winners of this biennial violin competition include Tasmin Little (1985) and Ray Chen (2008), and it's open to violinists of any nationality under 22 years old (Senior section) and 16 years old (Junior section) as of April 22, 2018. The competition is held in a different city each time - 2018's edition will be in Geneva, following on from London in 2016.

menuhincompetition.org

Neue Stimmen

Next competition:

final round October 8-15, 2017

Applications:

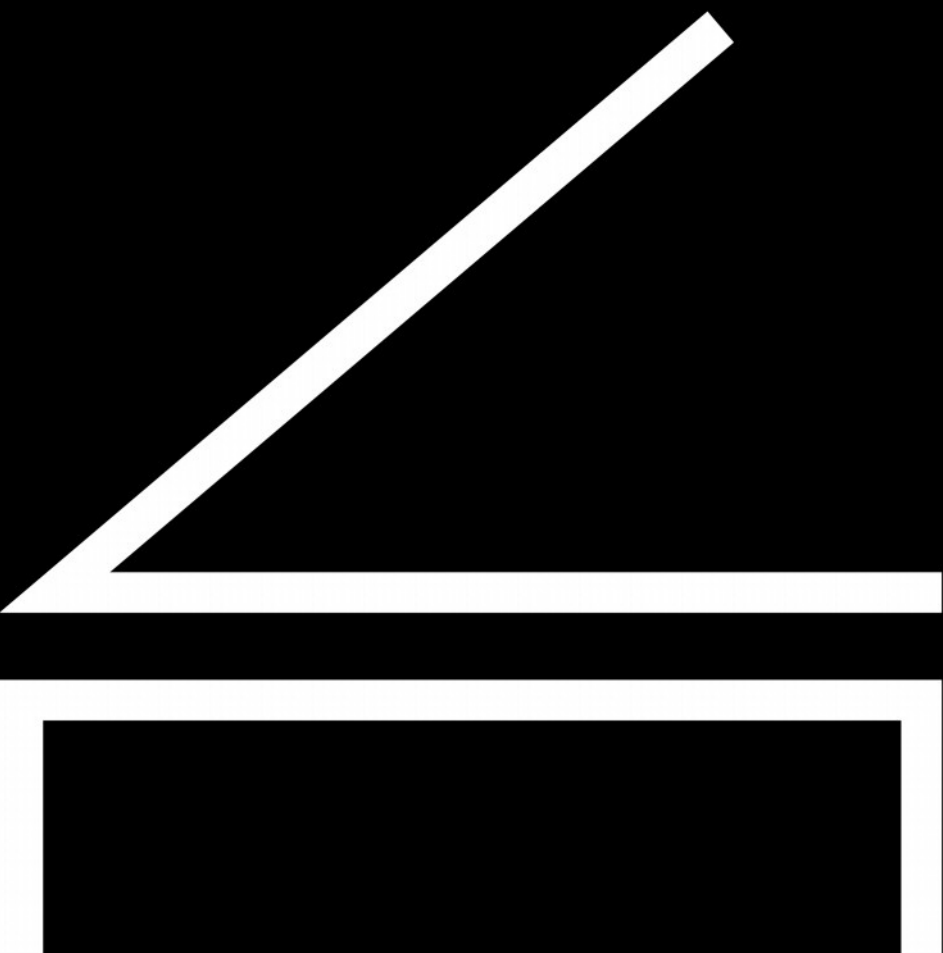
March 15 - January 31, 2017

Held biennially, this Gütersloh-based singing competition is open to female singers aged 28 and under, and male singers aged 30 and under, with a total prize-money pot of €60,000 to be split between three female and three male prize-winners. Among the other prizes on offer is a scholarship from the Liz Mohn Foundation for Culture and Music enabling the recipient to be involved at the Berlin Staatsoper's international opera studio for two years. The competition will be broadcast on radio and television, and both the semi-final and final concerts will be streamed live.

neue-stimmen.de



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MORE INFORMATION

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Orléans Brin d'herbe Junior Piano Competition

Next competition: April 6-9, 2017
Applications close February 13, 2017
 Taking place in the Salle de l'Institut, this junior piano competition run by Orléans International Piano Competition (the latter is in 2018) is open to pianists of all nationalities between the ages of six and 18, performing repertoire from 1900 to the present day. Amongst the awards are three €200 cash prizes to be given to the best interpretations of Marc-Olivier Dupin's music. There are also concert engagements at venues such as Paris's Theatre des Bouffes du Nord, and the Festival de Sully.
oci-piano.com

Prague Spring International Music Competition

Next competition: May 7-15, 2017
Applications closed
 Harpsichord and violin are this year's focus, with 32 the age limit for harpsichord, and 30 for the violin. Chairing the harpsichord jury is Fabio Bonizzoni, with Ivan Ženaty for violin. Violin finalists will perform with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra under Leoš Svárovský, while the harpsichord finalists will perform with the Bohuslav Martinů Philharmonic conducted by Vojtěch Špurný and with members of Collegium 1704. Each instrumental category offers a first prize of 200,000 Czech korunas, a second of 100,000 and a third of 50,000, among other awards. Czech Radio will record the second round and make it available the next day online, and will also live-video-stream the finals, with links on the competition website and Facebook page.
festival.cz/en/competition

The Queen Elisabeth Competition, Brussels

Next competition: May 8 - June 6, 2017; **Applications close** noon, January 11, 2017
 Distinguished previous winners of this Belgian competition include Nikolaj Znaider (violin,



June-Sung Park: winner of the Aram Khachaturian International Competition 2016

1997) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (piano, 1956). Up until now it's been for pianists, violinists and singers of any nationality, the discipline rotating annually, but 2017 introduces the first competition for cellists. Finalists perform two works with the Brussels Philharmonic, conducted by Stéphane Denève, at Brussels' Palais des Beaux-Arts. They're competing for 12 cash prizes topped by the first-place Queen Elisabeth Prize of €25,000. There's an exceptionally broad spectrum of streaming offerings too, through specialist classical streaming services Proximus, Canvas.be, Musiq3.be, RTBF Culture and ARTE Concert. The competition will also feature six young cello students commenting on the semi-finalists and finalists, sharing on Twitter (#KEW2016), Facebook and Instagram.
qeimc.be

The Queen Sonja International Music Competition, Norway

Next competition: August 8-18, 2017
Applications:
February 15 - April 1, 2017
 Open to singers of all nationalities born on or after January 1, 1985, this Oslo competition offers generous cash prizes including a first prize of €40,000. Perhaps even more important though is the exposure it gives singers to an international jury of influential figures in the operatic world, and the possibility of

engagements with leading Norwegian musical institutions such as the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. The 2015 winner was Norwegian soprano Lise Davidsen. Audiences can attend public masterclasses and all rounds of the competition. For remote viewers, the final concert is held on the main stage of the Norwegian National Opera & Ballet and will be broadcast live on TV and radio by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). Preliminary and final rounds will also be streamed online, and NRK will provide a televised broadcast of a masterclass.
qsimc.no

Tibor Varga International Violin Competition Sion Valais, Switzerland

Next competition:
August 22-29, 2017
 The three finalists for this biennial Swiss competition will be given the opportunity to perform a concerto with the Chamber Orchestra of Lausanne conducted by Gábor Takács-Nagy.
varga-sion-concours.ch

Top of the World International Piano Competition

Next Competition: June 17-23, 2017
Applications close February 15, 2017
 Open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 17 and 35, this biennial competition takes place in

Norway's midnight-sun city, Tromsø. There are some enticing cash prizes on offer: €30,000 for first place, €20,000 for second, and €10,000 for third. All the competition rounds, including the final, will be streamed on the competition's website.
topoftheworld.no

International Singing Competition of Toulouse

Next competition:
September 3-8, 2018
Applications close May 17, 2018
 Held biennially by the city of Toulouse since 1954, young singers aged between 18 and 32 perform opera excerpts, oratorio and Lieder with at least one piece by a French composer. Competition finalists are accompanied by the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra. First and second prizes, in both male and female categories, are €6500 and €3200.
chant.toulouse.fr

Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition and Academy

Next competition:
September 26 - October 2, 2017
Applications open January 1, 2017
 Founded in 2000, this biennial Norwegian competition alternates between the disciplines of string quartets and piano trios. For 2017 it's string quartets, and they're competing for prizes including a first prize of €15,000 plus festival engagements for 2018.
ticc.no

Valencia International Piano Competition Iturbi Prize

Next competition:
September 12-23, 2017
Applications close June 15, 2017
 Open to pianists of any nationality aged under 31, this triennial competition offers a first prize of €18,000 together with a CD recording plus recital and concert engagements. Second prize is €12,000 plus recital engagements, and third is €6000 plus recital engagements. There are three other cash prizes.
pianoiturbi.com

US & REST OF WORLD**Canadian International Organ Competition****Next competition:****October 10-21, 2017****Applications close January 30, 2017**

Open to organists aged under 35, this triennial event is one of the world's largest international organ competitions, welcoming a maximum of 16 competitors for three rounds which take place in different churches around Montréal. Cash prizes total C\$115,000, including a first prize of C\$25,000 along with the recording and distribution of a CD on ATMA Classique, three years of career management services for North America by Karen McFarlane Artists, and a three-year career development programme provided by the CIOC. There are plans for audio and visual streaming.

ciocm.org**Concours Musical International de Montréal****Next competition: May 2-12, 2017****Applications close January 14, 2017**

Held annually since 2002, this is a competition for pianists, singers and violinists, with the disciplines rotating annually. The 2017 edition is open to pianists aged 30 and under with a first prize totalling C\$80,000. Competition co-founder and president André Bourbeau presides over an international jury, to include David Owen Norris, and Cristina Ortiz. Finalists will perform a concerto with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, at the Maison Symphonique de Montréal. All rounds will be broadcast and streamed live on the competition website and also on its YouTube channel. CBC and Radio Canada will stream all rounds of the competition.

concoursmontreal.ca/en**Honens Piano Competition**

Next competition: August 30 - September 8, 2018; Applications close November 30, 2017

This major Canadian competition for pianists aged between 20 and 30 carries a cash first prize of C\$100,000,

plus a three-year artistic and career development programme. The two other finalists each receive C\$10,000.

honens.com**Aram Khachaturian International Competition****Next competition: June 6-14, 2017**

An annual competition whose disciplines rotate annually between piano, violin, cello, voice and conducting, this Yerevan-based competition is open to singers for 2017. Distinguished past jury members include violinist Zakhar Bron, pianist Rustem Hayroudinoff and the Philharmonia's David Whelton.

akhic.am**Arthur Rubenstein International Piano Master Competition****Next competition:****April 25 - May 11, 2017****Applications closed**

This Tel Aviv-based competition has been going for 43 years. Its first winner was Emanuel Ax, while Daniil Trifonov has been a more recent victor. Pianists on the international jury this year, chaired by Arie Vardi, include Peter Donohoe. In addition to concert engagements, the gold medallist receives US\$40,000, the silver medallist \$20,000, and the bronze \$10,000. The concerto final features the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under Omer Meir Wellber, and the Israel Camerata Jerusalem conducted by Avner Biron.

arims.org.il**China Shenzhen International Piano Competition****Next competition: June 11-23, 2017****Applications closed**

This triennial competition in Shenzhen is open to pianists of all nationalities born on or after June 23, 1986. Previous winners are Zuo Zhang (2006), Mariya Kim (2011) and Galina Chistiakova (2014). There are top prizes of \$30,000, \$20,000 and \$15,000. Broadcasting details are to be announced, but as the 2014 competition was broadcast and streamed by Shenzhen Media it's likely there will be a remote viewing option.

csipcc.com.cn**Isangyun Competition****Next competition: November 2017**

Founded in 2003 in memory of the South Korean composer Isang Yun (1917-95), this competition based in the city of Tongyeong alternates between the disciplines of piano, violin and cello, with violinists in 2017 and cellists in 2018.

timf.org**Kobe International Flute Competition****Next competition:****May 25 - June 4, 2017****Applications closed**

Established in 1985 and held every four years, this is one of the rare competitions dedicated to the flute alone; the 2017 competition is open to all flautists born on or after May 25, 1984. First prize is 2,000,000 Japanese yen, second is 1,000,000, third is 500,000.

kobe-bunka.jp**Osaka International Chamber Music Competition****Next competition: May 13-21, 2017****Applications closed**

Held triennially since 1993, this competition based in Osaka's Izumi Hall is open in 2017 to string quartets and wind ensembles of all nationalities born on or after May 14, 1981. First prize for each of the categories is 3,000,000 yen, second is 1,500,000 yen and third is 1,000,000. The first-prize winners of each category will also perform in Tokyo, as well as on a three-week concert tour.

jcmf.or.jp**Takamatsu Competition****Next competition:****March 14 - 25, 2018**

Taking place every four years since 2006, this piano competition, held in Takamatsu's Sunport Hall, aims to showcase the city, artists from around the world, and the music they play. Awards include a top prize of 3,000,000 Japanese yen and recital opportunities in Japan and overseas.

tipc.jp**The Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition****Next competition: July 13-22, 2017****Applications close May 1, 2017**

A joint venture between Ohio's Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Orchestra, this annual competition is open to accomplished young musicians aged 13-18 and rotates between piano and violin. The 2017 competition is for violinists and carries a top prize of \$20,000. Initial rounds, July 15-19, are in the conservatory's Warner Concert Hall and are streamed live via oberlin.edu/cooper. The final round on July 21 takes three violinists to Severance Hall to perform with the Cleveland Orchestra, broadcast on WCLV Classical 104.9 and streamed live on wclv.ideastream.org.

oberlin.edu/cooper/**Unisa Competition****Next competition: 2018**

The University of South Africa in Pretoria has been presenting international music competitions since 1982, including editions for piano, strings, voice, flute, clarinet and organ. The piano competition in 2016 added a jazz category. Total prize money is the equivalent of US\$65,000

unisa.ac.za**Van Cliburn International Piano Competition****Next competition:****May 25 - June 10, 2017****Applications closed**

Held every four years in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2013 first prize went to Vadym Kholodenko, with Beatrice Rana taking silver. The 2017 jury will be chaired by Leonard Slatkin and includes pianists Jean-Philippe Collard, Anne-Marie McDermott and Marc-André Hamelin. The latter will also write a new work to be performed by competitors. The Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra will perform with the competitors in the final stages with Nicholas McGegan conducting in the semi-final, and Leonard Slatkin conducting the final. The Brentano String Quartet also participates in the final round.

cliburn.org



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Competition Dates: 2018

| | |
|-------------|--|
| March 12-13 | Piano Selection |
| March 14-16 | Round 1 |
| March 17-18 | Round 2 |
| March 20-21 | Round 3 |
| March 24 | Final Round |
| March 25 | Result announcement Awarding ceremony |

Discipline: Piano

Competition Venue: Sunport Hall Takamatsu - Main Hall

Application Period and Deadline:

1st April 2017 - 20th Sep. 2017 (Postmark is acceptable)

Age limit:

Individuals born between 1st Jan. 1983 and 1st Jan. 2003

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The Initial Selection Round will be judged using DVDs (in DVD-video format) of applicants' performances.

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| | |
|------------|---------------|
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| 4th Prize: | 300,000 JPY |
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Susumu AOYAGI [Pianist, Japan]

Jury

Vincenzo BALZANI [Pianist, Italy]

DANG Thai Son [Pianist, Vietnam]

Klaus HELLWIG [Pianist, Germany]

Shinichiro IKEBE [Composer, Japan]

Ikuyo KAMIYA [Pianist, Japan]

Daejin KIM [Pianist, Korea]

Piotr PALECZNY [Pianist, Poland]

Mikhail VOSKRESENSKY [Pianist, Russia]

*The names of the Jury are listed in alphabetical order without their titles.



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Stepping inside the world's greatest music competitions

With advances in streaming and online interactivity, the best competitions are as exciting for remote audiences as they are for those attending in the flesh, writes Charlotte Gardner

The computer scientist Alan Kay once described technology as 'anything that wasn't around when you were born', but writing *Gramophone's* annual Competitions Guide again this year has been a pertinent reminder of how long even a single year can be in the world of technology. For, while streamed competitions were progressive deviations from the norm in 2016, the competitions *not* streaming are the anomalies within our 2017 guide.

At the root of this seismic shift in the landscape is the desire by competitions to have international appeal. Appearing in 79 per cent of the competition titles in this year's guide, the word 'international' had, before the advent of streaming, reflected the competitions' eligible participants more than it had their audiences. However, streaming is now allowing competitions to have a truly international profile, as the Tchaikovsky Competition demonstrated so extraordinarily in 2015 when it streamed for the first time, through medici.tv. The result was more than 10 million hits and more than 250,000 unique users, reaching 13,500 countries in 190 countries.

Watching this success closely from the UK were the new joint artistic directors of the Leeds International Piano Competition, pianist Paul Lewis and Adam Gatehouse; a new partnership with medici.tv sits at the heart of their revamped 2018 Leeds International Piano Competition. As Gatehouse explains: 'When Paul and I first got together



The Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition: streaming since 2013

to talk about the possibility of our taking over the artistic management of the Leeds, within the first five minutes we had both spontaneously said that we had to reach out to the biggest possible audience, and that meant streaming it.' He continues: 'The viewing numbers for the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition were 20 times higher than what the Leeds has probably reached in its entire 55-year history, and I don't think that any competition of real standing could now really satisfy itself with just reaching out to the physical audience in the hall.'

And who exactly is watching streamed competitions? Gatehouse believes it's not just the usual concert-goers. 'Let's not forget what turns people on', he points out. 'The *X Factor* element is something that people like, and there is probably an audience that would never go to a concert but that really enjoys watching the competitions.'

Streaming also offers huge benefits to the competitors, most obviously in terms of visibility. As Gatehouse recalls: 'When talking to young pianists about taking over the Leeds, almost

in the same breath as asking what our plans were, they said "I hope you're going to stream it". Streaming is a really, really important aspect for them, because it helps them reach an enormously wider audience, and also creates audio-visual material that they can use for their own purposes.'

In terms of streaming providers, although medici.tv dominates, it's by no means the only option. Deutsche Telekom AG sponsors the Beethoven Competition Bonn and provides its live streaming, which, for the last competition in 2015, was watched by 12,000 people during the competition period, and by 20,600 afterwards on demand. Other streaming providers being used by festivals include canvas.be, musi3.be, RTBF Culture, ARTE Concert and nomadmusic.fr.

Then there's Facebook streaming, which, for some competitions, is the most attractive option of all. Take the Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition, which had 8000 clicks when it first streamed its competition in 2013. The figure for 2015 was

slightly lower but, despite plans for the 2017 competition to be available on medici.tv, leader Kristin Reigstag still values the social-networking website: 'We're constantly re-evaluating our options as technology habits change, but Facebook is interesting as a direct channel', she says. 'At 800, our following may not be that big, but they choose us, and we also know that Facebook is used by the young ensembles to see what's on.'

The International Franz Liszt Piano Competition is also using Facebook and social media as the main means of communication. Plans for 2017 include Facebook-streaming the selection rounds in New York, Utrecht, Moscow and Tokyo, and there are also investigations into making streaming more immersive, possibly by incorporating virtual-reality elements.

Other festivals are thinking along similar cutting-edge lines, such as the Windsor Festival, which is investigating 360-degree live streaming for 2017, and Poland's Guitar Masters, which, for 2016, collaborated with Dolby Studios to bring 360-degree Dolby Atmos recorded sound to its own live streaming.

In the light of these technological advances, our competition guide this year is as much a mine of information for music lovers as it is for budding professional musicians. With the vast majority of competitions offering streaming or interactive elements, there are plenty of opportunities to get involved, and at a deeper level than before – wherever you happen to be.

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Stephen Plaistow hails the culmination of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's Beethoven cycle, a triumphant traversal of some of the greatest music ever written for the piano



Beethoven

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas – No 22, Op 54; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 24, Op 78; No 25, Op 79; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a; No 27, Op 90; No 28, Op 101; No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106; No 30, Op 109; No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Chandos (M) ③ CHAN10925 (3h 31' • DDD)



Bavouzet's chronological journey through the Beethoven sonatas has not been surpassed in the last 30 years. Yes, it's that good

Here is the concluding instalment – Volume 3 – of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's chronological journey through the 32 Beethoven sonatas, a cycle which may have been matched by one or two but has not been surpassed, I would judge, in the last 30 years. Yes, it's that good. I greatly enjoyed Volume 2 (3/14) and this is an even higher achievement. But then so is the music.

All the sonatas are here from No 22 in F, Op 54, which is the first of Beethoven's four solo sonatas of his maturity to be conceived as two-movement works, to the last one of all, No 32 in C minor, Op 111 – which famously foxed its Viennese publisher when it arrived and made him wonder whether a third, final movement had somehow been omitted from the parcel ('no, I didn't have time to write one'). I love that story. The differing dualities and oppositions of Nos 24 and 27 (F sharp major, Op 78, and Op 90 in E minor) are also in this collection, so if you want to sample the quality you could make yourself a recital of these four, perhaps, and disappear, with Beethoven, into the silence at the end of Op 111, after the descent from the celestial trilling, where you feel nothing more could possibly be said in the domain of the piano sonata.

Bavouzet, in his prime, has two rare gifts as a Beethoven interpreter. He makes you feel that each sonata is not only all of a piece but that its structure and not just its surface has an audible power. Second,

he conveys that what is experienced is indissolubly linked to its execution, both for the composer and for the pianist; the one illuminates the other. Before reflecting on these truths you'll almost certainly be delighted by Bavouzet's freshness of spirit, rigorous enquiry, openness to instinct and engagement with every aspect of this inexhaustible music. He radiates generosity and balance as well as a delight in being able to play the piano so well. You are aware of him and of the current that runs through – deriving not from his modesty, because he's no shrinking violet, but from the force of a personality who knows that without Beethoven and the task in hand he wouldn't be there. Just as it should be. The composer speaks and you wouldn't mistake Bavouzet for anyone else.

The frame of sonority, colour and character in which each sonata 'sits' is tellingly judged. They are as individual as children. The subtleties of connection between movements in the A flat Sonata,

Op 110, for example, emerge from under the player's control of finger and perceptions of continuity. They don't need to be flagged up but they occur as a feature in many of the sonatas and can be ruined by insensitive editing. Chandos's production values here are as good as you would expect. There were three sessions (at Pottton Hall) between the end of 2014 and the middle of 2016 but you could play through the set and take pleasure in the sound and imagine it was all set down in the course of a weekend. Bavouzet's attention to the dynamic life of Beethoven's sonatas is a model of what it should be: integral to the effect



In the studio: Jean-Efflam Bavouzet with producer Rachel Smith



A high achievement: the composer speaks and you wouldn't mistake Bavouzet for anyone else

and character of them at any moment, never a decorative add-on. As with his control of tempo and movement, you know exactly where you are: *fortissimo* is not the same as *forte*, only perhaps a bit more, and what does a triple-*piano* marking over the last chord of the first movement of the *Appassionata* Op 57 signify? When did you last hear a recording in which this registered as a degree quieter than *pianissimo*? Bavouzet wonders whether it's meant to ensure that this movement, encompassing extreme violence and heart-easing gentleness, should end in complete resignation. He misses nothing and is excellent, also, on the dialectic of sound and silence.

The transparency of his playing brings treasures I would never wish to be without. He uses so little pedal but he is not dry and he can sing like a...well, one of Messiaen's most eloquent birds, let's say, and certainly not a French woodpecker! There is vividness even in the intricacies

of the fugal finale of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, Op 106 (No 29), deliberately written, as Bavouzet points out in his notes, to be extremely difficult to master. You get the feeling, with him, that you are in a rarefied region, not a thorn bush, near the limits of known territory, and yet the air is exhilarating. And what trills! Good to know that such quality is humanly possible. As it is with his execution of the six-octave upward rush in the Scherzo (disc 2, track 8). This is not a *Hammerklavier* Sonata that has been tamed; it is exciting enough for me. If you prefer a manner that is rougher, more explosive, that chucks fistfuls of notes around the heavens and sets the aspidistras flying, look elsewhere. I like this one because it resounds.

A small reflection: Bavouzet won first prize in the Beethoven International Piano Competition in Cologne in 1986, long before we knew anything about him in this country or had any recordings. He has been

biding his time with the cycle of sonatas; no bad thing. Maybe his Haydn series, ongoing I trust, put down a marker for them. **Stephen Plaistow**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Thresher reviews Isabelle Faust's Mozart violin concertos:

'Faust's sound grows out of the corporate entity to glitter, coax, snarl and soar as required' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 60**



Peter Quantrill listens to Giuseppe Sinopoli's Dresden legacy:

'A fully representative, lavishly documented tribute to Sinopoli's gifts as both a creative and executive musician' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**

Adams • Harris

Adams Violin Concerto Harris Violin Concerto

Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Litton

Signum © SIGCD468 (62' • DDD)



John Adams coined the term 'hypermelody' to describe the solo part

of his 1993 Violin Concerto, where 'the violin spins one long phrase after another without stop'. This 'implacably melodic' character is arguably the work's main attraction as well as its primary difficulty. For the soloist, of course, Adams's Concerto is a *tour de force*. Beyond the simple issue of stamina, it requires mastering a long thread of irregular patterns, knotted with double- and triple-stops, all of which must give the impression of an unbroken 'singing line'. For the listener, the challenge is following this thread as it unspools, for, as beguilingly lyrical as much of the music is, the syntax is idiosyncratic, and there are precious few moments of respite. It's rather like reading Joyce when one is accustomed to, say, James.

By my count, there have been five recordings of Adams's Concerto before this one – all eminently recommendable. Tamsin Waley-Cohen's new account doesn't make the choice any easier, for her interpretation is technically beyond reproach and musically imaginative. What makes this recording indispensable is the coupling.

Roy Harris's Violin Concerto was written for Josef Gingold and the Cleveland Orchestra. The 1949 premiere was postponed due to discrepancies between the score and orchestral parts, and the work wasn't heard until the mid-'80s, when Gregory Fulkerson revived and recorded it (First Edition). It's an absolutely lovely piece and remarkably similar to Adams's in that, after a brief, proto-minimalist introduction, the violin takes wing on what might aptly be described as 'hypermelody'. And, as with Adams's Concerto, this melodic thread stretches continuously to

the end. Harris's folk-flavoured, modal-tinged style falls somewhere between Hovhaness and Vaughan Williams, although the final section brings Britten's *Sea Interludes* to mind.

Harris's Concerto is a major (re-)discovery, and Waley-Cohen outclasses Fulkerson's pioneering version in every respect. Andrew Litton and the BBC Symphony provide superb, supple support. Not to be missed.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Adams

Scheherazade.2

Leila Josefowicz *vn*

St Louis Symphony Orchestra / David Robertson

Nonesuch © 7559 79435-1 (48' • DDD)

Recorded live at Powell Symphony Hall,

St Louis, MO, February 2016



For most music lovers, the word Scheherazade likely conjures the plush orientalism of

Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral tone-poem. John Adams's *Scheherazade.2* (2015) also took inspiration from the Arabian Nights but via an exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris that, in the composer's words, detailed 'the casual brutality toward women that lies at the base of many of these tales [and] the many images of women oppressed or abused or violated that we see today in the news on a daily basis'.

Adams's 'dramatic symphony' does not tell a particular story but rather 'follows a set of provocative images'. Adams employs a solo violin to represent the resourceful protagonist, as Rimsky-Korsakov did, though here the part is considerably more elaborate. In fact, Adams's work was written specifically for violinist Leila Josefowicz and often sounds more like a concerto than a symphony or tone-poem – although it's quite distinct in style and tone from Adams's Violin Concerto.

Scheherazade.2 is an expansive, thematically dense and texturally intricate

work, and it took me a few listens to begin to grasp its overall structure. Initially, I tried to find my way using the images conjured by the movement titles and the composer's programme notes, but it wasn't until I stopped trying to divine an interpretation and simply allowed the music to guide my imagination that it began to pull together. There are exotic elements in the score, certainly (the prominent use of the cimbalom, for example), but these are more for colour than for content. Indeed, there's an organic quality to the piece's unfolding that feels closer to Sibelius or early Schoenberg than to Rimsky-Korsakov.

Josefowicz, who has been a champion of the composer's music for decades, gives a performance here that explains why Adams has such faith in her: suave and sensual, yet assertive and full of longing. The St Louis Symphony play with authority under David Robertson and the recording is beautifully balanced. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Bartók • Prokofiev • Stravinsky

Bartók Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119^o. The Miraculous Mandarin, Sz73 – Suite Prokofiev Romeo and Juliet – Montagues and Capulets Stravinsky The Firebird (1910 version)

Yefim Bronfman *pf*

London Symphony Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

LSO Live © 2 LSO5078 (97' • DDD)

Recorded live at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, October 24, 2015



Most LSO Live recordings rigorously eschew applause and include some remedial patching. This one has a different purpose, consciously intended to capture the thrills and spills of the band's collaborations with their toothpick-wielding former helmsman. His farewell concerts as LSO chief were marketed, to the wry amusement of some, as 'Valery Gergiev – Man of the Theatre'. The conductor's notoriously over-stuffed



'Born to conduct': Philippe Jordan and the Orchestra of the Opéra National de Paris perform Beethoven

schedule had often found him in St Petersburg's Mariinsky Theatre when he might have been expected at London rehearsals. That said, these final programmes played to his strengths and were followed by a successful US tour from which the present offering is drawn. The location is not one of the famous East Coast halls but Newark's New Jersey Performing Arts Center, a modern multi-purpose venue like London's Barbican Hall and, on this evidence, acoustically superior to it.

Most impressive, unsurprisingly enough, is the performance of Stravinsky's *Firebird* on the second CD. Long a speciality of the maestro, his commercial recording (Philips, 7/98) remains highly thought of. Red in tooth, claw and branding, it was made at a time when the Mariinsky company was still known by its Soviet-era Kirov tag. Little has changed in 20 years. Gergiev still makes an alarming burst of speed at the end of 'Kashchei's Infernal Dance', taking even further risks elsewhere. With the addition of plentiful vocalising from the podium, 'The Princesses' Khorovod' can rarely have been moulded so personally. This is one score whose every detail continues to fire the imagination of its director, the playing suitably spectacular. An ecstatic audience is rewarded with a shard from Prokofiev's

Romeo and Juliet, another beloved party piece.

Listeners may return less often to the first CD. It seems odd to be presented with a foreshortened *Miraculous Mandarin* Suite alongside a complete *Firebird* and, though the rendition is predictably gung-ho and calculatedly sleazy, its less confident moments may call into question Gergiev's palsied semaphore. The Third Piano Concerto won't be much of a draw in a competitive field, the microphones tending to inflate Yefim Bronfman's unforced pianistic presence. The first movement feels unhelpfully literal in any event; the second, a little unsettled in pacing and atmosphere, is made to seem over-bright. Was the interaction with Gergiev relatively fleeting? Bronfman's impregnable technique is not in doubt in the lively finale.

A curate's egg, then, and hence perhaps an apt souvenir of Gergiev's turbulent reign. **David Gutman**

Beethoven

Complete Symphonies

Ricarda Merbeth *sop* Daniela Sindram *mez*

Robert Dean Smith *ten* Günther Groissböck *bass*

Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra National de Paris / Philippe Jordan



ArtHaus Musik © ④ DVD 109 248;

© ③ 109 249 (6h 45' + 52' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra Bastille and Palais Garnier (Nos 2 & 7), Paris, September 2014 – July 2015

Includes 'Born to Conduct', a documentary by Rainer Moritz



Born to Conduct, the title of the hour-long documentary

about Philippe Jordan which is included in the new set, is not as self-serving as it might seem – not, that is, to anyone familiar with the work of his late father, the formidable and too little known Franco-German master Armin Jordan. His recordings of Haydn's *The Creation*, Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Wagner's *Parsifal* merit a place in any well-sourced collection, as do many of his recordings from the French repertory. (See Erato's 13-CD retrospective 'Armin Jordan: The French Symphonic Recordings', which Peter Quantrill reviewed last month.) Meanwhile, if this first set of the Beethoven symphonies from the 42-year-old Philippe Jordan is anything

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JOHN ADAMS
SCHEHERAZADE.2

Written for violinist Leila Josefowicz, this recording of Adams's "dramatic symphony" was made during 2016 performances by the St. Louis Symphony, led by David Robertson.

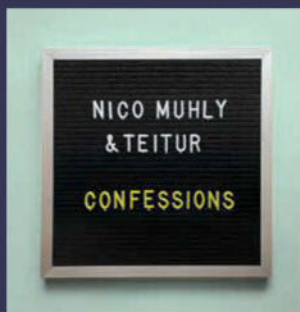
'Scheherazade.2 is at once a violin concerto and an orchestral showpiece. Romance mixes with drama, luscious vistas of Ravel with outbursts of Stravinsky in his spectacular Russian fairy-tale vein.' **Financial Times**



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A collaboration between the acclaimed American composer Nico Muhly and Faroese singer/songwriter Teitur, which began when Muhly was composer-in-residence at Muziekgebouw Eindhoven. Recorded with Holland Baroque.

'A quirky, charming mix of songs combining Teitur's winsome voice and Muhly's baroque string textures.' **The Atlantic**

nonesuch

nonesuch.com

to judge by, he too is a musician of special character and discipline.

It is a forward-thinking director of the Paris Opéra who invites his orchestra to perform the nine Beethoven symphonies. Like the Covent Garden and New York Metropolitan orchestras ('Levine's Ferrari' as Jordan calls the latter), the orchestra of the Paris Opéra has never doubled as a concert-giving organisation. France's (and the world's) first great Beethoven conductor, François-Antoine Habeneck, might have established such an ensemble in the late 1820s; yet, despite being director of the much-lauded Opéra orchestra, he lacked the necessary political and financial power. As a working alternative, he established the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, with which he spent many years rehearsing and preparing these formidably difficult works for public performance.

In his preface to the set, Jordan talks of small halls (the tiny Lobkowitz Palace where the *Eroica* was first performed), slimmed-down orchestras and fast metronomes. In the event, none of this pertains. The vast modernist Opéra Bastille and the smaller and more generously upholstered Palais Garnier both boast large auditoria. As a consequence, the orchestra is substantial (roughly the size of Habeneck's, though without Habeneck's antiphonally divided violins), with speeds that are keen without being unduly rushed.

As a conductor, Jordan knows his trade. Those who remember Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt's widely collected 1960s Decca cycle with the Vienna Philharmonic will find similar satisfaction here, even if, understandably, there are times when the Paris musicians take fire and times when their approach to the notes is rather more circumspect. The only performance I didn't care for was the that of the Ninth; it has a tentative first movement and a finale where the large and slightly unruly Paris Opéra Chorus brings to the music something of the feel of a works outing.

Jordan's reading of the *Eroica* may be work in progress (there are some old-fashioned slowings and *subito piano* 'effects' which could usefully be discarded) but the road map is a good one. In the Seventh and Eighth symphonies he refuses to be rushed yet retains a keen sense of where tension needs to be built. He segues the opening two movements of the Seventh Symphony and the second and third movements of the Eighth to rather good effect.

There are spruce and stylish accounts of the two early symphonies but it is the performances of the Fourth and Fifth symphonies that genuinely stand out. The

Fifth has always been a French speciality. Carl Schuricht's 1949 Paris Conservatoire recording (Decca, 9/50) was famous in its day. Indeed, the encomium it received in these columns ('intense, vital and dramatic') could be used here more or less word for word. Like Schuricht, Jordan keeps the *Scherzo* and the finale in the same basic pulse. One difference is that Jordan takes all the repeats, including the rarely played *Scherzo* repeat. In the Fourth Symphony, German heft is married to Grecian fire rather as it is in Karajan's first Berlin account (DG, 2/63), complete with the same lovingly unfurled string and wind appoggiaturas in the first-movement development.

The video direction is sensible. Look up from the score and the camera will generally be following what you are following. Sadly the sound quality is none too good from either venue. A certain boxiness prevails, added to which there are some acoustic black spots which have either gone unnoticed or been impossible to remedy. Most troubling are the *pianissimo* horn pedals which go off like foghorns, drowning out the real matter in hand. The start of the Ninth Symphony suffers particular badly, as does the 'Scene by the Brook' in what is an otherwise splendidly earthy account of the *Pastoral* Symphony. We are used to hearing nightingales, cuckoos and quails in the Heiligenstadt woods near where Beethoven walked but not the bitter'n's unearthly boom.

Richard Osborne

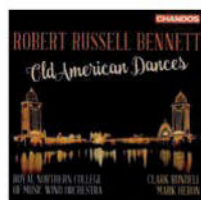
Robert Russell Bennett

Suite of Old American Dances^a. Down to the Sea in Ships^b. Four Preludes^a. Symphonic Songs^b. Autobiography^a

Royal Northern College of Music Wind Orchestra /

^aClark Rundell, ^bMark Heron

Chandos © CHAN10916 (70' • DDD)



Richard Rodgers liked to tell a story about a Broadway arranger who insisted that he was at least 50 per cent responsible for the success of a show. Rodgers threw him a sheet of blank manuscript paper. 'Go on then – arrange me a hit.' If we think of Robert Russell Bennett at all, it's probably as an arranger (albeit a hugely influential one) rather than as a composer in his own right. But, whatever else this new collection of his music for wind band proves, it's that Bennett, for one, never had to be afraid of a blank page.

Chandos has done him proud. The Royal Northern College of Music Wind

Orchestra is a professional-level outfit, and in Mark Heron and Clark Rundell they've got two of the world's foremost conductors in this field. These are bright-eyed, upfront performances, alert to Bennett's kaleidoscopic sense of instrumental colour, and delivered with energy and an enjoyable hint of swing. If you don't get quite the same wall-of-sound punch that Frederick Fennell used to deliver in this repertoire, Chandos's warm and clear recorded sound is unquestionably more pleasant on the ear.

As for the music: well, it's real peanut-butter-and-jelly-sandwich stuff, at its wittiest in the Midwestern nostalgia of Bennett's seven-movement *Autobiography*, at its most expansive in the NBC documentary score (complete with startlingly realistic foghorn) *Down to the Sea in Ships*, and at its most uninhibitedly tuneful in the *Old American Dances*. As a melodist Bennett is no Rodgers or Gershwin, but he's got charm to spare and it bubbles over on this disc. This is a regular Thanksgiving feast of mid-century Americana; it should give a lot of pleasure. **Richard Bratby**

Berio • Mahler

Berio Sinfonia^a

Mahler Frühe Lieder (orch Berio)^b

^bMatthias Goerne bar ^aSynergy Vocals;

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Josep Pons

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2180 (61' • DDD • T/t)



All the post-war masters looked to Mahler for inspiration in their own ways. To

Stockhausen he was a visionary, beyond parody: 'For those who do not accept the message of the poems Mahler used, his music can only be an acoustic toy.' When he wrote those words in 1972, he could well have had the third movement of *Sinfonia* in mind. If so, Berio proceeded to prove him wrong, not only with these 'straight' orchestrations of songs in Mahler's early and folkier vein, but also with a series of works in which he wove himself into the music of the past by Schubert, Boccherini, Puccini and others with sincerity, affection and no small measure of Stockhausen-sized pride, much as Schubert and Richard Strauss saw themselves fit to quote Beethoven.

So the coupling on this disc is original and soundly conceived. Matthias Goerne projects each song with ursine power and humour, albeit in slightly frayed voice. His larger-than-life stage persona fits Berio's vividly faithful arrangements, as though Mahler himself had taken time out from orchestrating the Seventh Symphony to

work on them. Goerne and Josep Pons have also performed *Das Lied von der Erde* together, and their fellow feeling for a late-Mahlerian, nostalgia-soaked aesthetic is illustrated to powerful if disconcerting effect by an icy expressionist edge which chills the verdant exuberance of 'Frühlingsmorgen' and 'Hans und Grete'.

On a first hearing, Pons may appear to bring a less decisive force of personality to *Sinfonia*, content to marshal a crystalline backing track from the BBC Symphony Orchestra and leave the meat of the work's eschatological argument to the eight singers of Synergy Vocals, who are placed very forwardly in the mix. But then so were the Swingle Singers in the composer's own pioneering recording, and I will hazard that Pons has taken careful note of it. In that notorious third-movement palimpsest of Western music, the effect is frankly confrontational as quotations jostle for attention like caricatured egos in a balloon debate. Even the often-overlooked fourth movement pulses with a newly imagined tension and flickers with a no less exquisitely observed attention to the interface of text and music than found in the second-movement elegy to Martin Luther King. Much as I liked Hannu Lintu's Ondine recording, this new one feels even truer to the spirit of '68 which inspired *Sinfonia*. **Peter Quantrill**

Berio – selected comparison:

Finnish RSO, Lintu (1/15) (ONDI) ODE1227-5

Bruckner

Symphony No 2 (1877 version, ed Haas)

Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra /

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2708 (62' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Maison Symphonique,

Montreal, September 2015

Bruckner

Symphony No 3 (1873 version, ed Nowak)

Staatskapelle Dresden / Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Profil © PH12011 (72' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Semperoper, Dresden,

September 21, 2008



Bruckner's Second Symphony is arguably the most problematic of the canon in terms of textual matters. The critical edition published by Haas in 1938 attempted to resolve the problem by combining versions of the score dating from 1872, 1873 and 1877. The Nowak edition of 1965 removed

a number of passages included by Haas but otherwise represents a similarly composite version of the symphony. Matters improved considerably in the early 21st century with separate versions of the symphony dated 1872 and 1877 being published under the editorship of William Carragan. The Carragan editions have not entirely been immune from criticism (the scholar Benjamin Gunner Cohrs has suggested that 1873 and 1892 versions would have been preferable) but have otherwise superseded the Haas and Nowak editions. Not so, however, for Yannick Nézet-Séguin, who has chosen to use the Haas for this recording, the first conductor to do so for quite a few years.

Whatever the reasons for Nézet-Séguin's choice (no explanation is provided in the booklet-note), in practice we get to hear the horn solo at the end of the 1872 *Adagio* (which Bruckner later rescored for clarinet) without the additional 106 bars of music found in the 1872 finale. The *Adagio* is a highlight of this recording, with eloquent contributions not just from solo horn but also from violin, flute and bassoon. Here, as elsewhere, Nézet-Séguin's conducting is direct and straightforward, Bruckner's markings diligently observed, particularly with regard to dynamics. Among recordings of the Haas score, I wouldn't want to be without Haitink's taut and often fiery performance, nor the expressive splendour of Chailly's version, but Nézet-Séguin's is a commendable addition to his ongoing cycle.

Nézet-Séguin's recording of the Third Symphony on Profil comes into direct competition with his 2014 recording for ATMA Classique, both featuring the Nowak edition of the first version of 1873. The ATMA recording has the advantage of a conductor with an additional six years of experience, a not insignificant factor with a musician then still under 40, while the Profil recording has the inestimable benefit of the Staatskapelle Dresden. On this occasion, orchestra trumps experience. The Dresden performance is notable for the slow tempi that were a common feature of Nézet-Séguin's early Bruckner performances, requiring almost six minutes longer than in Montreal. However, the earlier performance has a sense of purpose and elemental power that eclipses the later one, aided in no small part by the phrasing, expressiveness and tonal depth of the orchestral playing. A few transitions might have been negotiated more smoothly here and there and, as so often with this edition of the symphony, the finale doesn't quite convince, but the performance overall has a grandeur that befits the scale of Bruckner's

original conception. Derived from a radio recording, the sound quality is excellent and the audience noise minimal. The inclusion of a 50-page booklet in German and English necessitates a double jewel case being used, although only a single CD is needed for the symphony.

Christian Hoskins

Symphony No 2 – selected comparisons:

RCO, Haitink (5/70^e) (PHIL) 475 6740PB9

RCO, Chailly (3/94^e) (DECC) 475 3312CD10 or 482 4454

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

Montreal Metropolitan Orch, Nézet-Séguin

(3/15) (ATMA) ACD2 2700

Castello

Sonate concertate in stil moderno, libro primo

Academy of Ancient Music / Richard Egarr *hpd/org*

AAM © AAM005 (69' • DDD)



Dario Castello has in recent years turned into one of the stars of 17th-century

instrumental music, a thoroughly deserved status that has been achieved despite the fact that we know next to nothing about his life other than that he was a wind player at St Mark's in Venice at the time Monteverdi was in charge of the music there. Instead it is the quality and white-heat fantasy of his two published books of ensemble sonatas that have done all the talking.

Although Castello has appeared on numerous anthologies, this is, I think, the first time all the sonatas from his first book, first published in 1621, have been presented together. It is a rich treat, possibly (as the Academy of Ancient Music's theorbo-player William Carter suggests in a readable booklet-note) more than is good for you in one sitting. Yet so eventful are these 12 trio- and quartet-sonatas that you can indeed find yourself gorging greedily. Castello described them as 'in stil moderno', and he wasn't just boasting; cast in the single-movement but multi-sectional manner of the *stylus phantasticus*, they tumble excitedly through a variety of moods, tempi and textures, leaving you eager to find out what comes next, and often being delighted by it.

The AAM deploy eight musicians over the course of the disc, ranging according to Castello's suggestions through delicious combinations of airy violin, eloquent cornett, sonorous trombone, fruity dulciant and tautly buzzing violetta, an unusual kind of high cello. The sound of the continuo organ, a splendid thing with real eight-foot pipes, is also not to be missed. The difficulty of these sonatas was acknowledged by Castello but



Jiří Bělohlávek conducts the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in music of their homeland

the AAM's expert players are gleefully equal to the job, and, in music which must sometimes feel rather like a bucking bronco, know when to rein it in and when to give it its head. A joy for ear and spirit. **Lindsay Kemp**

Copland

Appalachian Spring. Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Detroit Symphony Orchestra / Leonard Slatkin
Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559806 (72' • DDD)



Appalachian Spring is most frequently heard in the 1945 concert suite for full orchestra, which omits around nine minutes of music from the original chamber score of the year before. As with his previous recording with the St Louis Symphony for EMI, however, Leonard Slatkin opts for the full length orchestral version of the ballet prepared by Copland in 1954 at the behest of Eugene Ormandy. Most of the material restored to the ballet takes the form of an extended passage that immediately precedes the majestic final variation of the Shaker hymn 'Simple Gifts' – a discursive interruption perhaps, but one that adds a degree of emotional weight to the work. Slatkin's new interpretation is vigorous and communicative, and the playing is

distinguished too, but the recording has a close-up perspective that's not always conducive to conveying the music's repose and atmosphere; in this respect the plusher EMI recording is preferable, as is RCA's recording for Tilson Thomas.

Set in a courtroom during a murder trial, Copland's ballet *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* was composed in 1934 for the dancer and choreographer Ruth Page. Although early performances were moderately successful, Copland was dissatisfied with the music and withdrew both the ballet and a concert-suite version shortly afterwards. Despite a number of ideas that haunt the mind's ear, the writing lacks the inspiration of Copland's finest writing and offers only an intermittently satisfying listening experience. That said, Oliver Knussen's performance with the London Sinfonietta, originally released by Argo, is remarkably successful in bringing the score to life, helped by a demonstration-class recording. Slatkin's new version is vivid and direct but doesn't quite have the same panache and, as with *Appalachian Spring*, the recording is rather close and airless. The Naxos disc does not identify the 18 scenes of the ballet, although they are listed on the Naxos website. **Christian Hoskins**

Appalachian Spring – selected comparisons:

St Louis SO, Slatkin (11/89⁸) (EMI/WARN) 648645-2
SFS, Tilson Thomas (9/00⁸) (RCA) 82876 65840-2

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! – selected comparison:

London Sinfonietta, Knussen (10/94⁸) (DECC)
478 5424DTC or 478 4585DM2

Dvořák

Slavonic Dances – Op 46; Op 72

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek
Decca (F) 478 9458 (76' • DDD)



In my experience it's fairly rare that conductors who excel in Dvořák's first set of

Slavonic Dances are quite as effective in his second set. Rafael Kubelík with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra provides a rare exception but with Jiří Bělohlávek I sense a preference for, or at least a special empathy with, the second set. Decca's richly detailed Rudolfinum recording helps consolidate that impression, with its firm bass-line and wide dynamic range.

Bělohlávek is especially effective in the Brahmsian contours of the second and eighth of the Op 72 dances, both involving the very Brahmsian marking *grazioso*. Go to, say, 3'14" into Op 72 No 2 and note the way upper strings are richly supported by their lower-lying counterparts, or the similarly opulent opening of Op 72 No 8, the whole performance phrased with

intelligence and affection. Most important (especially here) is the way Bělohlávek and his players convey the emotional heart of the music, its natural ebb and flow.

The faster dances work too, most notably Op 72 No 3, where Bělohlávek negotiates meaningfully shifting tempi with genuine skill: you intuit a narrative slant to the playing, a sense of yearning in the same dance (1'34", conveyed principally by the woodwinds) before Dvořák launches us on a dizzy, thunderous *accelerando*. That narrative aspect is at its most poignant in the melancholy Op 72 No 4, while the faster, cheerier central section (3'01") unfolds with a winning smile.

As to Op 46, Bělohlávek offers weighty, purposeful accounts of the faster dances and brings a discernible pastoral element to the slower ones. As with Op 72, whenever tempi vary within a single piece, he marks the transitions with the hand of a true master. All that is really missing in Op 46 is a clinching degree of exhilaration, a breezy quality that Kubelík, Karel Šejna and Karel Ančerl (with the Vienna SO, only in mono at the moment but soon to be reissued in stereo) bring to the music almost as a matter of course. A brighter, lighter touch is I suppose what I mean, but in all other respects this is an exceptional set of the *Slavonic Dances*. **Rob Cowan**

Selected comparisons:

Vienna SO, Ančerl (11/59⁸) (ELOQ) ELQ476 7334

Czech PO, Šejna (11/61⁸) (SUPR) SU1916-2

Bavarian RSO, Kubelík

(11/75⁸, 12/75⁸) (DG) 457 712-2G0R

Ghedini

Appunti per un Credo. Musica notturna^a. Studi per un affresco di battaglia. Sonata da concerto^b
^bAndrea Oliva // ^aAndrea Tacchi, ^aChiara Morandi
vnrs Orchestra della Toscana / Daniele Rustioni
 Sony Classical (P) 88985 36641-2 (59' • DDD)



Little of Giorgio Federico Ghedini's orchestral music has appeared on disc, so

Daniele Rustioni's survey of four of his major scores is of considerable importance. Like many 20th-century Italian composers, Ghedini frequently took Renaissance or Baroque tradition as his point of departure, yet his music is neither retroactive nor nostalgic, but forges a uniquely modern language, at once immediate and severe. He matured late, not reaching prominence until he was nearly 50. The works recorded here date from the last 20 years of his life.

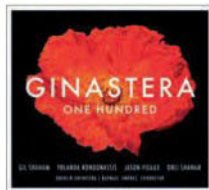
The best known is *Musica notturna* (1947), in which consonance and

dissonance flow unsettlingly into one another and a group of solo instruments – two violins, then a mandolin – trace figurations that sound like distorted memories of Vivaldi's concertos. The austere counterpoint of *Appunti per un Credo* (1961) has its roots in the asymmetric melodies of plainchant, and a comparable, if at times unnerving, insistence on rhythmic asymmetry is apparent in the neo-classical *Sonata da concerto* (1958) for flute and strings. In *Studi per un affresco di battaglia* (1962), commemorating the massacre, in Rome in 1944, of Italian partisans by Nazi troops, a threatening *allegro* gives way to a fierce lament that eventually spends itself in exhaustion over distant drum taps.

Rustioni proves a superbly intelligent guide to Ghedini's combination of intellect and passion. You notice the basic string sound changing from piece to piece, as the leanness of *Appunti* gives way to the queasy over-ripeness of *Musica notturna*. He's wonderfully alert to Ghedini's ambivalent way with brass and woodwind, where beauty and menace are differentiated by the sparest shifts in timbre. The soloists are uniformly excellent, though the mandolinist in *Musica notturna* should ideally have received a credit along with his colleagues. The violinists in the same work are placed a bit too close in an otherwise finely balanced recording. It's a significant achievement that forces us to reappraise a composer all too frequently overlooked. Recommended. **Tim Ashley**

Ginastera

'One Hundred'
 Harp Concerto, Op 25^a. Pampeana No 1, Op 16^b.
 Danzas argentinas, Op 2^c. Guitar Sonata, Op 47^d
^bGil Shaham *vn* ^{bc}Orli Shaham *pf*
^aYolanda Kondonassis *harp* ^dJason Vieaux *gtr*
^aOberlin Orchestra / Raphael Jiménez
 Oberlin Music (P) OC16-04 (55' • DDD)



This centenary tribute to the Argentine composer Alfredo Ginastera is the brainchild of harpist Yolanda Kondonassis – an act of gratitude, she writes in the booklet-note, for the 'gift' of the composer's Harp Concerto (1956/68). Her performance abounds with affectionate detail, particularly in the third-movement cadenza, which she plays with a keen sense of dramatic timing and a range of colour that's breathtaking. The orchestra of the Oberlin Conservatory under Raphael Jiménez provide solid support, though they

lack the power and élan of the Mexico City Philharmonic under Bátiz or the Lyon National Orchestra under Robertson.

The *Pampeana* No 1 (1947) is an Argentine rhapsody along the lines of Bartók or Enescu, with a long, song-like introduction leading into a rollicking, virtuoso dance. Gil and Orli Shaham underscore the music's modernist elements in a spiky, lean-toned and rhythmically taut reading. Much the same can be said for Orli Shaham's cleanly articulated, thoroughly unsentimental interpretation of the folkloric *Danzas argentinas* (1937), though I still prefer Fernando Viani's Naxos recording for its warmth and ferocity.

Ginastera's Guitar Sonata (1976) has been served well on disc, with well over a dozen versions available. I can't say I know them all, but I've heard enough to confidently assert that Jason Vieaux's account is superb. He glides through the technical challenges of the Scherzo with playful ease and moulds the curt, angular phrases of the slow movement into a richly expressive, lyrical whole.

For those new to Ginastera's music, this varied programme would be a fine place to start. Guitar lovers, in particular, should not hesitate to hear Vieaux's masterful performance. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Harp Concerto – selected comparisons:

Allen, Mexico City PO, Bátiz (8/89) (ASV) CDDCA654

Moretti, Lyon Nat Orch, Robertson (NAIV) V4860

Danzas argentinas – selected comparison:

Viani (NAXO) 8 557911/12

Haydn

'The Haydn Album'

Cello Concerto No 1, HobVIIb/1^a.

Keyboard Concerto No 11, HobXVIII/11^b.

Symphony No 6, 'Le matin'

^aDaniel Yeadon *vc* ^{bc}Erin Helyard *hpd*

Australian Haydn Ensemble / Skye McIntosh

ABC Classics (P) ABC481 2806 (69' • DDD)



If I had heard these performances in concert I would doubtless have enjoyed them with few reservations. The 20-strong Australian period band are a polished, style-conscious ensemble, and both soloists have plenty to say about the music. On CD, of course, the performances have to pass the test of repeated listening and justify themselves in the face of the (abundant) competition. *Le matin* – from Haydn's early 'Times of Day' trilogy that crosses the symphony with the Baroque concerto grosso – seems to me to come off best. The vernal opening movement goes

with an infectious swing, solo violin and cello consort gracefully in the *Andante*, and bassoon and double bass evidently enjoy their unlikely double-act in the Minuet's Trio (no wheeziness here). And while the tempo for the finale initially sounds a shade cautious, it does mean that violinist Skye McIntosh can dispatch her fiendish toccata figuration without fluster.

The concertos – arguably Haydn's best before the Trumpet Concerto – are more controversial. Vastly experienced both as a Baroque cellist and as a gamba player, Daniel Yeadon has a clean, oaky tone and uses vibrato sparingly and selectively. His fluid approach to tempo pays dividends in the speaking eloquence of the *Adagio*, where the central development here evokes CPE Bach at his most darkly ruminative. But a tendency to meditate has its dangers in the first movement, which can lose crucial momentum; and while Yeadon lustily characterises the finale's comic antics – not least the grotesque plunges into the abyss – his fondness for distending the tempo means that the orchestra has to spurt forward each time it re-enters.

Playing on a reproduction double-manual French harpsichord, Erin Helyard has an even freer approach to rhythm and tempo in the D major Concerto, advertised on its initial publication as

'for harpsichord or fortepiano'. Perhaps I'm simply prejudiced. But the delicately ornamental *Adagio*, in particular, has always seemed to gain from the dynamic shadings possible on the fortepiano. Not even Helyard's sensitive timing and apt changes of manual can persuade me otherwise. Beyond this, the wide tempo fluctuations in the first movement and the finale can be superficially effective but never sound convincingly integrated. Helyard goes into a daydream at several points in the gypsy rondo finale, then takes the impassioned B minor theme (at 2'53") appreciably slower than the surrounding music – ear-tickling idiosyncrasies when heard in concert, perhaps, but liable to irritate on repetition. Andreas Staier, playing on a period fortepiano (Harmonia Mundi), is my clear first choice in this popular work. And while I'm glad to have heard Yeadon in the Cello Concerto, rivals including Steven Isserlis (RCA), Truls Mørk (Virgin Classics) and Christophe Coin (L'Oiseau Lyre) convey at least as much character without Yeadon's sometimes slow-and-loose approach to tempo. **Richard Wigmore**

Jongen

Symphonie concertante, Op 81^a. Passacaglia et gigue, Op 90^a. Sonata eroica, Op 94^a

^aChristian Schmitt ^{org} ^{ab}Deutsche Radio
Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern /
Martin Haselböck

CPO (P) CPO777 593-2 (68' • DDD/DSD)

^aPlayed on the Karl Schuke organ of the
Philharmonie, Luxembourg



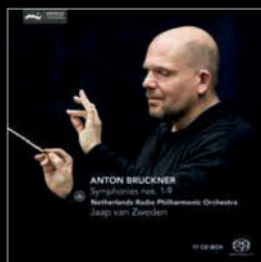
Jongen's friend
Eugène Ysaÿe pointed
out that the *Symphonie
concertante* might

better be called a symphony for two orchestras, since the organ's role 'is not limited or restricted; it is clearly a second orchestra that enriches the first'. Woefully under-represented on disc, it was commissioned in 1926 by Rodman Wanamaker for his Philadelphia department store. Unfortunately, a series of delays resulted in his never hearing the work (he died in 1928) and the US premiere was not given for another seven years.

The first of its four movements (marked 'in modo dorian') opens – rather than closes – with a fugue; you might hear echoes of Vierne in the enchanting second-movement Divertimento, perhaps Debussy and Richard Strauss in the 'sunrise' third movement, while the exhilarating final Toccata (*moto*



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perpetuo) is in the great French toccata tradition – but with added testosterone.

Despite a slightly restricted acoustic, your reviewer's benchmark and one for which he retains a deep affection is the recording made in 1967 by Virgil Fox conducted by Georges Prêtre (EMI – nla) and played on the magnificent organ of the Palais de Chaillot (removed in 1977 to make way for a car park and now residing in the Auditorium Maurice-Ravel in Lyon). Schmitt and Haselböck lack their sheer élan – everything is very correct and a little earnest, the organ very much the equal rather than dominant partner – but nevertheless provide a suitably exhilarating experience.

The two other items may well tip the balance in its favour, for the orchestra-only *Passacaglia and Gigue* (new to me) is well worth investigating. The *Gigue* movement turns out to be a minor-key treatment of the old Tyneside song 'The Keel Row'. The *Sonata eroica*, Jongen's masterpiece for solo organ, is in the great tradition of multi-movements-in-one works like Liszt's *Ad nos* and Reubke's *Sonata on the 94th Psalm*. All in all, a highly recommendable tribute to the Belgian composer, so it's a pity that the booklet has a full-page photo identified as Joseph Jongen but which is in fact of Alexandre Guilmant. **Jeremy Nicholas**

MacMillan

Violin Concerto^a. Symphony No 4^b

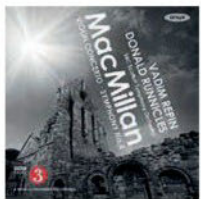
^aVadim Repin *vn* ^aGillian de Groote *spkr*

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /

Donald Runnicles

Onyx Ⓢ ONYX4157 (65' • DDD)

^bRecorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London, August 3, 2015



Now approaching 60, James MacMillan is surely the most recorded of

contemporary British composers and this new Onyx disc couples two of his most important recent orchestral works.

Immediately notable is that the primary elements of his Violin Concerto (2009) are enshrined in its movement titles. In 'Dance', conflict between energetic and lyrical ideas is mediated by the soloist then brought to a head in the hectic coda. Scottish folk music of a more relaxed nature is encountered in 'Song', its strident climaxes offset by passages where the soloist soars in its highest register and is joined by the percussion in some of MacMillan's most imaginative scoring. A pity 'Song and Dance' falls down through striving to amalgamate these archetypes;

its faster music is often contrived, with the second theme an unlikely take on Viennese schmalz. The spoken element (in German) is redundant, leaving the finale to be unified by scintillating solo-writing which culminates in a virtuoso cadenza and is capped by the peremptory ending.

MacMillan's concertos have often been revived but his symphonies less so. Coming after the spiritual conflict of *Vigil* (No 1), the intimacy and incisiveness of its successor, then the existential quest of *Silence* (No 3), the Fourth Symphony (2015) unfolds an overtly abstract conception whose unbroken 37-minute span centres on an intensifying juxtaposition of faster and slower music that is increasingly pervaded by allusions to Robert Carver's motet *Dum sacrum mysterium*. These give focus to a work whose formal trajectory accumulates more through force of will than by subtle organisation, and this applies equally to an orchestral sound world reliant on an emotional rhetoric which too often spills into overemphasis. But then, MacMillan has always been a creative figure for whom musical understatement is rarely, if ever, a priority.

That the symphony conveys the eloquence that it does is in no small part down to the conviction of Donald Runnicles, who draws a committed response from the BBC Scottish Symphony. Vadim Repin is also admirable in the solo part of the concerto, which could well find itself a place in the modern repertoire. Immediate sound and insightful notes by the composer enhance a significant release. **Richard Whitehouse**

Morricone

'60 Years of Music'

Chi Mai. Cinema Paradiso – Love Theme; Nuovo Cinema Paradiso. A Fistful of Dollars – Titoli. A Fistful of Dynamite – Main Theme. For a Few Dollars More – Main Theme. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly – The Ecstasy of Gold; The Fortress; Main Theme. H2S – Main Theme. The Hateful Eight – Bestiality; Stage Coach to Red Rock. The Lady Caliph – La Califfa. Metti, una sera a cena – Croce d'amore; Main Theme. The Mission – Falls; Gabriel's Oboe; On Earth as it is in Heaven. Once Upon a Time in America – Deborah's Theme. Once Upon a Time in the West – Jill's Theme; The Man with the Harmonica. Queimada – Abolisson. The Untouchables – Death Theme **Czech National Symphony Orchestra / Ennio Morricone**
Decca Ⓢ 570 007-1 (74' • DDD)

'Music from the Motion Pictures'

Addinsell Warsaw Concerto^a **Arnold Hobson's** Choice – Suite (arr C Palmer) **Badelt** Pirates of

the Caribbean – He's a Pirate (exc) **Beethoven** Symphony No 7, Op 92 – Allegretto **E Bernstein** The Magnificent Seven – Suite **Herrmann** Vertigo – Suite **Newman** 20th Century Fox Fanfare **Norman** James Bond – Main Theme **Wagner** Die Walküre – Ride of the Valkyries **J Williams** Schindler's List – Theme^b. Star Wars – Throne Room and Finale

^bVeriko Tchumburidze *vn* ^aAnastasia Voltchok *pf*
Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt (Oder) / Howard Griffiths

Klanglogo Ⓢ KL1518 (62' • DDD)



Ennio Morricone attended the same high school as the director Sergio Leone, a handy link that stood them both in good stead when Leone was seeking a composer for a film that would redefine the sound of the traditional western. Morricone's bold and highly personal music blew away the favoured Americana soundtrack in favour of short motifs and punctuated phrases scored for a heady mix of voices singing and grunting, harmonica, electric guitars and whistles. Audiences were first made aware of them in *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), the first of the so-called spaghetti westerns.

Decca has now produced this handsome tribute to Morricone, conducted by him and sequenced so that the music runs from one title to another virtually without a break, mood and key taking precedence over running order. Morricone finally won an Academy Award for Best Score in 2016 for *The Hateful Eight*, in which his thirst for innovative scoring shows no sign of abating. *The Mission* and *Cinema Paradiso* are familiar enough but the romantically inclined *Once Upon a Time in the West* and the debonair *Metti, una sera a cena* ('One Night After Dinner'), an Italian sex comedy from the late Sixties, bring a lighter touch. Although on a grander scale than the original soundtracks, these performances retain the flavour of them. *For a Few Dollars More* is played with gusto and the strings lend a dignity to the Death Theme in *The Untouchables*, with its veiled saxophone line. Authenticity is never in doubt.

'Hollywood in the Concert Hall' is Franz Groborz's apt description in the booklet for 'Music from the Motion Pictures', which includes the Ride of the Valkyries from *Apocalypse Now* and the slow movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, recently employed in *The King's Speech*. Film composers have been reticent, to say the least, as to the increasing and



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indiscriminate employment of the classics in their film scores; suffice to say that these two interlopers are very well played and conducted in the company of the Rachmaninov-inspired *Warsaw Concerto*, the jovial *Hobson's Choice* and *Vertigo*, the most substantial items. The Klanglogo label will no doubt have its knuckles rapped by a higher power than mine for crediting the *James Bond* theme to John Barry (nor is it his arrangement) instead of Monty Norman. The sequence of music works well and the resonant recording does full justice to some of the best screen music written over the past 70 years. **Adrian Edwards**

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 25, K503

The Cleveland Orchestra / Mitsuko Uchida *pf*

Decca © 483 0716DH (67' • DDD)

Recorded live at Severance Hall, Cleveland, OH, February 11-13, 2016



Hot on the heels of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's vivacious K453 (complete with

his own cheeky cadenzas) comes Uchida's latest instalment in her series with The Cleveland Orchestra. Latest and last, according to the blurb on the back, which is a great shame, for this has been a compelling addition to the Mozart discography.

The G major, K453, is particularly alluring: details are uncovered as if for the first time (just check out the bassoon countermelody from 4'04" in the first movement, for instance) and the wind players are in particularly fine fettle – giving Abbado and Pires a run for their money. As accompanist, Uchida is the most generous of colleagues, withdrawing her sound to a whisper. By contrast, the cadenzas (Mozart's own) are wondrously shaded, and in that of the slow movement she plumbs the depths before drawing to an ethereal close of considerable beauty. It's only in the quietest moments that you realise there's an audience present at all. The lustrous slow movement is more elegiac than in many readings (Andsnes is notably faster here), we as listeners privy to the most intimate of conversations.

The finale also sets off at an unhurried pace – observing its *Allegretto* marking – allowing us to enjoy the theme's natural elegance. Others may take it faster but Uchida and co find so much of interest in the following variations here that you're constantly engaged. The interplay between soloist and orchestra is particularly sparky

and the *Presto* conclusion provides a true contrast, thrillingly upbeat yet never merely breathless. No question, this is up there with my favourite performances of K453 – by Pires and Andsnes.

The C major Concerto, K503, is as martial as K453 is intimate and the opening *tutti* has a Beethovenian strength to it, brilliantly punctured by Uchida's gleefully understated entry. Having said that, the slow movement is a tad too slow for my taste, though unquestionably caressing in its effect (by comparison Argerich and Abbado seem positively *allegretto*). The Cleveland are particularly responsive in the finale, which opens with such unassuming grace before exploring darker landscapes; in the middle section Uchida's duet with oboe then flute has a wonderfully rhapsodic quality.

If you're already collecting this series, you'll need no encouragement from me. But for K453 in particular, this is a winner.

Harriet Smith

Piano Concerto No 17 – selected comparisons:

Pires, COE, Abbado (2/96) (DG) 439 941-2GH

Andsnes, Norwegian CO (4/08) (EMI) 500281-2

Bavouzet, Manchester Camerata, Takács-Nagy

(11/16) (CHAN) CHAN10929

Piano Concerto No 25 – selected comparison:

Argerich, Orch Mozart, Abbado (3/14) (DG) 479 1033GH

Mozart

Violin Concertos – No 1, K207; No 2, K211;

No 3, K216; No 4, K218; No 5, K219.

Adagio, K261. Rondos – K269; K373

Isabelle Faust *vn*

Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini

Harmonia Mundi © ② HMC90 2230/31

(129' • DDD)



Mozart's violin concertos are never far from the centre of any violinist's repertoire.

Written while the composer was still a teenager, they can hardly be considered among his deepest music (the string concerto masterpiece is, of course, the magnificent *Sinfonia concertante* of 1779-80), yet they maintain all the *galant* charm and suavity of the period as we hear the boy coming of age, experimenting with forms and growing more harmonically daring and melodically assured.

For Isabelle Faust's recording of the five concertos, she teams up for the first time with the period instruments of Il Giardino Armonico. Giovanni Antonini is the nominal conductor but these wonderful performances have the air of chamber music, of close listening between soloist, band and director. Faust isn't spotlighted in the

remarkably clear engineering but seems part of the ensemble, her sound growing out of the corporate entity to glitter, coax, snarl and soar as required. She has always struck me as a player who cannot help but look beyond the notes, examining each phrase and paragraph to wring out of them more than simply phrases and paragraphs. She varies her ornamentation delightfully and, as an added treat, plays cadenzas and lead-ins specially written by the keyboard player Andreas Staier, who knows a thing or two about 18th-century style.

Faust doesn't couple the *Sinfonia concertante* here (the mouth waters at the prospect of a future recording of it) but fills the disc with the three extant single-movement pieces Mozart wrote for violin and orchestra: an *Adagio* and a *Rondo* from 1776 and another *Rondo* from 1781, shortly before his break from Salzburg and his freelance decade in Vienna. In the E major *Adagio* (K261), especially, there is a radiance to her playing that, in a way, brings these standalone works in from the cold, elevating them to the level of the concertos. It's not all lush sonority, though: Faust's vibrato-lite tone adds a real sting to *sforzandos*, while her high-lying passagework is rock-solid in terms of accuracy and intonation, and her unwillingness to play rows of semiquavers as strings of equal notes makes for some piquant inflections. As for the 'Turkish' episode in the final concerto, the slapped pizzicatos and astringent *spiccato*s really add spice to the drama – although even here Faust plays as part of an ensemble, not as a foot-stomping star soloist.

The world is not short of recordings of this music and, in true *Gramophone* fashion, it must be acknowledged that most listeners will have their favourites from the innumerable classic discs that have appeared over the decades. However, for period instruments, period sensibility and state-of-the-art engineering, you may find yourself hard-pressed to better this thought-provoking and eminently enjoyable cycle.

David Threasher

Prokofiev

Romeo and Juliet, Op 64

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

LAWO Classics © ② LWC1105 (145' • DDD)



Norwegian orchestras have been here before...up to a point. Mariss Jansons set down two suites from *Romeo and Juliet* with the Oslo Philharmonic (EMI, 5/89), more



'A compelling addition to the Mozart discography': Mitsuko Uchida plays Piano Concertos Nos 17 and 25

than a decade before he threw in the towel, citing the acoustic problems of the band's home base. Few would deny that Bergen's Grieg Hall comes over better in Andrew Litton's selection (BIS, 7/07) – three suites, suitably reordered. Looking beyond Scandinavia, if you want the 20th century's greatest full-length ballet score complete in audio format, the field is not as competitive as might be supposed. While readers will have their own favourites from Gennady Rozhdestvensky to Vladimir Ashkenazy, there remains a gap in the market for a truly first-rate rendition in state-of-the-art sound. LAWO's pink-themed packaging looks more contemporary than LSO Live's for Valery Gergiev and I was expecting the former to triumph on sonic grounds as well. In the event the bass-light, aseptic sonority of Vasily Petrenko's ensemble is not necessarily preferable to the sheer clout of the LSO in the concrete bunker that is London's Barbican Hall.

In place of Soviet-style weight, Petrenko wields a new broom. His tempi are often too extreme for dancing, or for fencing, come to that. Sections within numbers are refreshed unpredictably, sometimes slowed, more often swift, voicings tweaked to expose long-buried lines or surprising points of colour. The music sounds less implacably Russian

that it does under Gergiev, whose concentration may come and go – he lacks fire in the earlier fight scenes – but whose overall approach is nothing if not idiomatic. Petrenko refuses to overplay the emotional conflicts latent in the music. Favouring parody over pomp (for example, track 8's ceremonial 'Interlude', in which Gergiev is a third slower), his 'Young Juliet' (track 10) really is young, bouncing from one activity to another as if suffering from attention deficit disorder.

Neither set includes the material Prokofiev discarded when revamping his original 1935 ballet, the one with the non-Shakespearean 'happy ending', in which the protagonists do not die but are 'released' as Christian Science contends 'from the false reality of their material being'. On the plus side, Petrenko has a proper chamber organ in the 'Balcony Scene', where Gergiev resorts to solo strings. Elsewhere, an interpretation designed to underline the fragility of young love risks coming across as relatively inconsequential until we near the final curtain. Is this psychological insight or an unwillingness to engage?

David Gutman

Selected comparisons:

Bolshoi Tb Orch, Rozhdestvensky
(9/61*) (MELO) MELCD100 0908

LSO, Gergiev (5/11) (LSO) LSO0682

Sydney SO, Ashkenazy (1/13) (EXTO) EXCL00087*

Reznicek

Goldpirol. Wie Till Eulenspiegel lebte.

Konzertstück^a. Prelude and Fugue. Nachtstück

^aSophie Jaffé ^{vn}

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra / Marcus Bosch

CPO © CPO777 983-2 (69' • DDD)



The works on this disc – part of a leisurely continuing series from CPO – date from the period between 1900 and 1918, after Emil Nikolaus von Reznicek (1860–1945) had the progress of a very impressive career as conductor and composer cut short by scandal of a very unscandalous sort. The detailed booklet-note describes them as transitional, even detecting a sort of polystylism *avant la lettre* in the *Konzertstück* of 1918, recorded here for the first time.

I think that's being a little optimistic. In that work's first movement we ramble through a series of violin concerto tropes that largely sound familiar – there are echoes of Mendelssohn's, and on a couple

of occasions I fully expected the orchestra to burst in with Tchaikovsky's big polonaise theme. The third movement, based on an 'original Scottish dance', feels like a very distant relation to the finale of Korngold's Concerto. The central movement is lyrical, thoughtful and greatly more cohesive – one can understand why Reznicek kept that movement but replaced the outer ones to produce his later Violin Concerto.

The *Goldpirol* idyllic overture has plenty of the composer's characteristic unexpected and humorous touches, mixing brief snatches of pastoral idyll with a few martial interjections and a bit of brassy galumphing. But it also feels rather bitty and inconsequential. Similar complaints might be made regarding the *How Till Eulenspiegel Lived* symphonic interlude, from the opera Reznicek completed in 1900. Beyond Straussian comparisons, it's intriguing mainly for a stylised evocation of olde worlde pageantry that seems to look forward to film music.

More consistently satisfying is the Fugue, on a whole-tone subject and in which the composer's imagination is disciplined by a formal process; the preceding Prelude is another slightly rambling hotchpotch. Best of all is the concluding *Nachtstück*: lyrical, wistful and occasionally punctuated by delicate muted-horn jabs, it's a gem.

The performances under Marcus Bosch are very decent and affectionate, and Sophie Jaffé is a sweet-toned soloist in the *Konzertstück*. No revelations here, but well worth a listen if you're curious about a figure once hailed, as the booklet tells us, as the equal of Strauss and Pfitzner.

Hugo Shirley

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 4, Op 36. The Nutcracker, Op 71
Mariinsky Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Mariinsky 11 2 3 MAR0593 (129' • DDD/DSD)



A *Nutcracker* is for life, not just for Christmas. Or perhaps not.

Valery Gergiev has abandoned his 1998 Philips recording (with his Mariinsky Orchestra, then still called the Kirov) in favour of a brand new puppy on the orchestra's own label. Rather than sprinting through the ballet in 81 minutes to squeeze it on to a single disc, he takes a marginally more leisurely 84 minutes, entailing a second disc, but enabling another re-recording: the mighty Symphony No 4 in F minor.

Gergiev's first *Nutcracker* was breathless in places but it bristled with action in a

hyperactive sort of way. Most of the dances here are fractionally slower, apart from the 'Arabian Dance', which is ushered along the sand dunes with undue haste on a cushion of swooning strings and sinuous woodwinds. The 'Waltz of the Flowers' is now a much more relaxed affair, giving Tchaikovsky's waltz space to blossom.

Gergiev is a man of the theatre and, unsurprisingly, the big moments are powerful: those arching phrases as the *Nutcracker* leads Clara off into the Land of Snow are glorious, as is the sumptuous *pas de deux* for the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Prince. The Mariinsky recording subdues the treble to some extent, meaning less percussion glitter and sparkle than on Philips' yuletide confection, but it carries greater bass weight.

If the new *Nutcracker* is a matter of swings and roundabouts, then Gergiev's second recording of the Fourth Symphony is definitely an improvement on his insipid 2002 Vienna Philharmonic effort. Fate looms larger for the Russians, with lugubrious woodwinds and grainy lower strings to the fore. The second-movement *Andantino* is taken much more slowly this time round (11'27"), Gergiev adding nearly two minutes to his Vienna account. After the plaintive oboe solo, he draws such restrained string playing that the flute counterpoint (bar 85, 3'05") to the violin melody really sings forth. The pizzicato Scherzo flicks and darts along before the finale whips up excitement, albeit not on the manic, hair-raising scale of Evgeny Mravinsky and the Leningrad Philharmonic. A stocking-filler to suit most ardent Tchaikovskians this Christmas.

Mark Pullinger

Nutcracker – selected comparison:

Leningrad PO, Mravinsky (6/61^R, 8/87) (DG)

419 745-2GH2 or 477 5911GOR2

Kirov Orch, Gergiev (1/99) (PHIL) 462 114-2PH

Symphony No 4 – selected comparison:

VPO, Gergiev (8/05^R) (PHIL) 475 6315PX3

Vivaldi

'Concerti per due violini'

Concertos – RV127; RV505; RV507; RV510; RV513; RV527; RV529

Giuliano Carmignola, Amandine Beyer *vns*

Gli Incogniti

Harmonia Mundi 11 HMC90 2249 (70' • DDD)



you know where to start? When one of those recordings has not a single concerto

on it that you have knowingly heard before, how can you guess its worth? Well, if you see the words Gli Incogniti on it, that's a pretty good sign; and if next to them there is also the name Giuliano Carmignola, that ought to be a clincher.

Assuming you already like Vivaldi, there is perhaps not much more that needs to be said, but that would be to deprive me of my chance to enthuse. Amandine Beyer's orchestra has impressed many with its dynamic performances of Baroque string repertoire, revealing a particular aptitude for identifying the contours of Vivaldi's music and communicating its heady power to entrance. Their recent 'Il teatro alla moda' disc of rarely heard solo violin concertos (Harmonia Mundi, 12/15) was an ear-opener, and the ability it showed to expose the music's inner dialogues finds further expression in this new disc of double concertos, with Carmignola as guest soloist. These are performances that burst with life, and right from the unaccompanied sparring between the soloists at the beginning of the first track (RV507) there is not a dull moment: the echo games in the finale of RV505 are brilliantly realised, no two of them quite the same, and even the solo-less 'ripieno concerto', RV127, included in the programme is somehow made urgently expressive. The tone of soloists and orchestra alike is rich and vital, and the recording has the right mix of clarity and bloom.

Carmignola also recorded six totally different Vivaldi double concertos with Viktoria Mullova and the Venice Baroque Orchestra (Archiv, 11/08); but, though that too is exciting, there is less warmth than here. Beyer contributes a charming note in praise of Vivaldi and of the experience of being caught up in his music 'like a drop of water tossed by the raging current'. Yes, Vivaldi is a force of nature, but it takes humanity to set it loose. Lindsay Kemp

Vivaldi • R Panufnik

'A Violin for All Seasons'

R Panufnik Four World Seasons^a

Vivaldi The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Tasmin Little *vn* with

^aGraham Bradshaw Tibetan singing bowl

Chandos 11 CHSA5175 (63' • DDD/DSD)



'I am not a Baroque player', says Tasmin Little, and there's

nothing like laying your cards right out on the table. These are modern-instrument performances of Vivaldi with a big symphonic string section. And if you haven't already run screaming

for your Fabio Biondi or La Serenissima sets, you're going to enjoy this disc a lot.

So in bounds 'Spring', strutting like a cockerel – bold, bright and infectiously (there's no other word for it) springy. With Little directing from the violin, there's a satisfyingly torrential heft to the downpours of 'Summer', just as the slow movements of 'Spring' and 'Summer' have a specially hushed intensity when played by a larger body of strings. No Kennedy-like deconstruction here: Little simply responds to the music with an open-eyed freshness and fantasy that's all the more remarkable when you consider how often she must have played these works. She is lively and conversational, and conveys a vivid sense of character to her colleagues. Listen to the little icicle swirls from David Wright's harpsichord at the start of 'Winter' or the gutsy pizzicatos in the final hunt of 'Autumn'. Moments such as the inner movement of 'Winter', where Little drapes her lustrous tone all over the melody, are a delicious bonus.

Little's virtuosity comes spectacularly to the fore in Roxanna Panufnik's *Four World Seasons* – whether in the Piazzolla-like rhythms and stratospheric heights of the opening 'Autumn in Albania', a Himalayan winter scene complete with chiming, warbling Tibetan singing bowl,

or Little's fabulously free but precise birdsong imitations in the shimmering 'Spring in Japan'. Panufnik has written a really effective response to Vivaldi, ideally tailored to Little's artistry. Booklet-notes by Jessica Duchon are the icing on the cake.

Richard Bratby

Wagner

The Ring – An Orchestral Adventure

(arr Henk de Vlieger)

Baltic Sea Philharmonic Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi

Sony Classical (P) 88985 36068-2 (59' • DDD)



In January Kristjan Järvi released, with his young Baltic Sea Philharmonic, a recording of his own reduction of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (2/16), a work that his father has also recorded (complete) to great acclaim. Now it's Henk de Vlieger's 'orchestral adventure' based on Wagner's *Ring*, a cycle that on many levels is about the questioning of paternal authority – and this new recording comes into direct competition with one by Järvi senior.

De Vlieger's arrangement obviously has its casualties: Wotan is one, as are Sieglinde and Siegmund, since *Die Walküre* is

essentially represented only by the Ride of the Valkyries and the Magic Fire Music. There's a fair bit of changing as well as chopping, as the music doesn't necessarily appear in the order Wagner himself sets out. The challenge for the conductor is to ensure it makes sense on its own terms, which both Järvi do by creating their own tempo relations, as well as imposing a certain 'symphonic' smoothness.

An example in Kristjan's case is the way he matches a very fast-flowing opening Rhine with a swift Immolation Scene – rather too swift, in fact. The Magic Fire Music, fast at first, settles down into a slower tempo, which then winds down further as it settles into the Forest Murmurs (realised with beautiful tenderness here). The Ride of the Valkyries is exciting, but I'm not sure I really warm to the conductor's tempo adjustments at the start of the Funeral March.

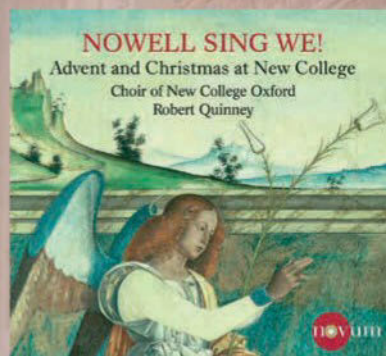
Sony's sound is spacious and airy, and matched by playing from the orchestra that is lucid and virtuoso but occasionally lacking in Wagnerian heft. The violins, in particular, strike me as a little short on character, and they lose some of their accuracy towards the end (the booklet names a pair of 'live recording producers', but doesn't state unequivocally whether the recording was live, or when it was made).



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CHAMPIONING UK COMPOSERS

Kate Molleson listens to the latest batch of releases from NMC, a label which has become a central part of Britain's new music world



'Another compelling young voice': London-based composer Mark Bowden

NMC is the record label founded by composer Colin Matthews in 1989 with the explicit aim of championing contemporary classical music from the British Isles. Apparently a significant instigator was a concert of new works at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1987 that drew a full house but was not broadcast, meaning the music was heard by only 800 people. Matthews found himself pondering how to ensure broader access to new music, and he settled on recording as the answer. The quality of this latest batch of NMC releases – the calibre of the performances, the care and detail in the recorded sound, the significant platform these albums provide for young-generation composers – is proof of how central the NMC label has become to the UK's contemporary music infrastructure.

The best seller of the bunch will doubtless be **War Memorials**, a collection of brass band music commemorating the two world wars and in a way the least typical NMC release. It's a beautiful throwback. A century ago every major British composer wrote brass music – Holst, Britten, Vaughan Williams, Ireland, Bliss, Elgar, more – but the website Brass Band World draws attention to the ghettoisation of brass band music today, noting that 'recordings that bridge the gap between the banding and classical worlds have been

precious few in recent times'. Well, here is one such recording.

During the Second World War, the civil engineer Guy Maunsell designed anti-aircraft forts on sandbanks in the Thames/Medway Estuary. They are bizarre and lonely-looking structures that provided a first defence against Nazi bombers and submarines, and their decaying remains provided the inspiration for John McCabe's piece *The Maunsell Forts*, with a solemn and unflinching passacaglia at its heart and a long, gorgeous closing elegy based on Bach's chorale 'O sacred head now wounded'.

Robin Holloway's two *War Memorials* date from the early 1980s and allude to popular songs and 1940s imagery – a cocky soldier here, a doleful funeral march there. Lucy Pankhurst's *Voices* (2014) goes in for marching steps and voiceovers of letters home from the trenches over emotively swelling brass. Neither matches McCabe's stark, angry summation of the angst and nervy solitude of soldiering. The disc opens with Britten, the cautionary jubilation of his *Occasional Overture*, and closes with a collection called *Diversions after Benjamin Britten* that intersperses his four *St Edmundsbury Fanfares* with responses by Pankhurst, Simon Dobson, Paul McGhee and Gavin Higgins. The works are splendidly performed with warm, rounded, intimate sound from

Wales's Cory Band conducted by Robert Childs and shinier, punchier playing from Tredegar Town Band under Ian Porthouse.

A Second World War theme also runs through **Claudia Molitor's** sound installation *The Singing Bridge*. Waterloo Bridge was first built in 1817, a beauty of Cornish granite and Doric columns. When the foundations started to crumble in the early 1940s, a workforce of women labourers constructed the new concrete span that still stands today, and that's the social history that inspired Molitor. The piece was meant to be experienced in situ via a headset overlooking the bridge; as such, *The Singing Bridge* was a fine piece of musical psychogeography, with sensitive location recordings, traffic noises and wonky, fine-spun, industrial-ish prepared piano sounds interwoven with nimble contributions from poet SJ Fowler, folk band Stick in the Wheel and drum/synth duo AK/DK. As a soundscape alone it is evocative and delicate. Molitor has a wonderful way with filigree textures.

Emily Howard's music is dark and spacious, robust and sleek. She's the kind of composer who can summon big atmospheres in compact terms. There's a quote from the poet Geoffrey Hill in the booklet-notes of 'Magnetite' describing her work as 'austerely sensuous and sensuously austere', which seems about right. Her inspirations come from poetry, physics, chess; she has a degree in maths and computer science and her music holds together with rigorous logic without sounding formulaic or clinical. The album's title-piece is the score that made her name in 2008, and played by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Andrew Gourlay its impact is hefty, resolute, ceremonial. In *Threnos*, mezzo Lucy Goddard and bass Simon Whiteley spin marvellous caterwauls around each other; in the string quartet *Affence* (the term describes how the brain receives signals from the body) the excellent Elias Quartet sound honed, elegiac and skittish. My favourite work on the disc is *Leviathan* for baritone saxophone (Joshua Hyde) and percussion (Noam Bierstone), which dwells in the fascinating textures of grotty split tones and strange partials.

Mark Bowden is another compelling young voice, another composer with an inquisitive mind for science references. The thing that captures me most in his music is its subtle, supple sense of movement: there is always an interesting flux. The four pieces on this disc were written in a decade (2005-15) during which he spent four years as composer-in-residence with

the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and his aptitude for orchestral writing shows in the cello concerto *Lyra*. The orchestration glitters and glows while the solo line roams and soars; the interaction is playful, adventuresome and intricate, though cellist Oliver Coates sometimes gets lost or left behind in the mix.

Heartland is a percussion concerto and ballet score, fluid and alert with Julian Warburton as soloist. Pianist Huw Watkins and violinist Hyeyoon Park are poised and expressive in the Calvino-inspired *Five Memos* – the third movement, 'Exactitude', is breathtakingly simple and played with masterful stillness. *Sudden Light* is the oldest piece and the most bombastic, inspired by Leibniz's theory on music as 'the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting'. The BBC NOW under Grant Llewellyn give a robust, swaggering performance.

The **London Sinfonietta Shorts** series launched in 2008 when the Sinfonietta asked composers to contribute tiny scores for its 40th birthday. Most of the pieces were written for specific players and their characters are palpable – Dai Fujikura's rather tense solo bass piece *es* was retaliation for Enno Senft always complaining about his bass parts. The idea of the shorts worked so well that the ensemble kept commissioning, and this latest group opens with Anna Meredith's big-statement *Axeman*, a blazing outburst for electronically distorted bassoon, and moves on to Jonathan Harvey's marvellous *Little Duo*, Mark Bowden's sensuous, cyclical *Parable* for alto saxophone and Harrison Birtwistle's *Duets*. For a snapshot of many NMC-related artists, this downloadable collection is an ideal starter. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs War Memorials
Cory Band; Tredegar Town Band
NMC © NMCD226



Molitor The Singing Bridge
AK/DK; Stick in the Wheel
NMC © NMCDL3027



Howard Magnetite
RLPO / Andrew Gourlay
NMC © NMCD219



Bowden Sudden Light
BBC NOW / Grant Llewellyn
NMC © NMCD214



Various Cpsrs Sinfonietta Shorts
London Sinfonietta
NMC © NMCDL3012:25

It's an enjoyable disc, nonetheless, and an impressive showcase for Järvi's band. Järvi *père's* account, with the added bonus of the *Siegfried Idyll* as coupling, is probably more recommendable, however, assuming that this 'orchestral adventure' appeals in the first place. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

RSNO, N Järvi (4/08) (CHAN) CHSA5060

Giuseppe Sinopoli

'Edition Staatskapelle Dresden, Vol 35'

Liszt Orpheus, S98 **Schumann** Symphony No 4, Op 120 **Sinopoli** Pour un livre à Venise – Hommage à Costanzo Porta. Lou Salomé – Symphonic Fragment^a. Tombeau d'Armor III^b **R Strauss** Ein Heldenleben **Wagner** Rienzi – Overture **Weber** Oberon – Overture
Staatskapelle Dresden / Giuseppe Sinopoli,
^bSylvain Cambreling, ^aPeter Ruzicka
Profil © 2 PH07053 (142' • DDD)
Recorded live 1993-2004



Until a heart attack felled him in 2001, Giuseppe Sinopoli had been a loving and assiduous curator of the 'Dresden sound'. Instantly recognisable from the horn solos of the *Oberon* Overture, as softly piercing as dawn light, or the trumpet-call to launch *Rienzi*, the Staatskapelle is the hero of the set, not excluding the glinting, Bergian textures of the conductor's own music.

Sinopoli's parallel study of archaeology could transfer itself too readily to the podium. London audiences in the 1980s puzzled over Philharmonia Orchestra concerts more like luxuriously published excavation reports, with every layer of detail scrupulously tagged and annotated. At any rate that was my experience, on the single occasion I saw him live, in Mahler's Eighth Symphony, and one borne out by many of his DG recordings. It was clear to see and hear how he was probing for a deeper meaning but what he found beneath the always beautifully turned surface was less obvious. Perhaps, like Busoni, he expected his listeners to do their own work and meet him halfway.

Compared to their studio-made counterparts, the well-chosen Romantic classics are very much live performances: more charged with tension and adrenalin in Weber, Liszt and Schumann, more emphatic in Strauss. Challenges of orchestral balance are less obviously investigated and eccentrically solved by the radio microphones than by DG's engineers. The playing is always assured while occasionally lacking the last degree of

polish at moments of high stress and transition – and arguably all the better for it. Schumann's Fourth, in particular, surges with unrepeatable inflection and on-the-night heat: anyone who remembers Sinopoli as interpretatively 'cool' needs to hear it.

The Battle Scene in this leisurely paced *Heldenleben* is thrilling not for a sense of a conflict lived in the here and now (go to Beecham or Strauss himself for that) but as a study for the extremes of pitch and timbre in *Elektra*. The hero's reconciliation with mortality is masterfully prolonged and graced with properly feminine, unpredictable solos from the Staatskapelle's leader, Kai Vogler.

His principal-cellist colleague Peter Bruns takes on the finely drawn, predominantly reflective solo part in *Tombeau d'Armor III*. The influence of Sinopoli's composition teacher Bruno Maderna is pervasive in the iridescent textures and wave-like forms of this 20-minute concerto, but Sinopoli had a happier accommodation than Maderna and his Darmstadt colleagues with time-honoured rhythmic structures such as ostinato and passacaglia repetition. *Pour un livre à Venise* is an exquisite, Webern-like instrumental translation of a 16th-century Venetian motet. Listeners familiar with the conductor's DG recording of the suites he extracted from his *Lou Salomé* opera (7/88) will recognise this 'symphonic fragment' as the opening of the First Suite, though Peter Ruzicka draws quite different voices from the texture of this lovechild of *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*.

Were this an 'Icon' article and not a review, the set would deserve its place at the end as a fully representative, lavishly documented tribute to Sinopoli's gifts as both a creative and executive musician. Profil has done his memory proud.

Peter Quantrill

'Danse macabre'

Balakirev Tamara **Dukas** L'apprenti sorcier
Dvořák The Noontide Witch, Op 108 B196

Ives Three Outdoor Scenes – Hallowe'en
Mussorgsky Night on the Bare Mountain (arr Rimsky-Korsakov) **Saint-Saëns** Danse macabre, Op 40^a

^aAndrew Wan *vn*

Montreal Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano
Decca © 483 0396DH (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Maison Symphonique, Montreal, October 29 & 30, 2015



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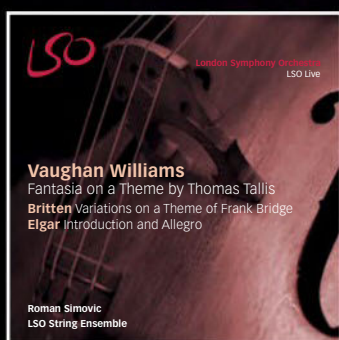
Vaughan Williams

Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis

Britten Variation on a Theme of Frank Bridge

Elgar Introduction and Allegro

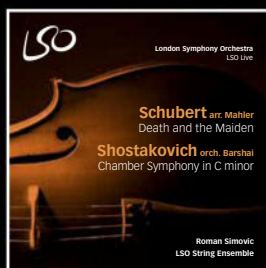
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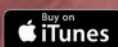


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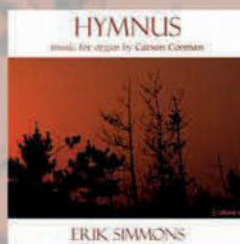


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different composers, linked only by the shared theme of Halloween. Ideal as a soundtrack to apple-bobbing, then; for the rest of the year it is essentially a snapshot of Kent Nagano and his Montreal orchestra circa 2015. As such, it's pretty good. Those translucent strings and lean woodwinds are well served by Decca, and the recorded sound has an excitingly wide dynamic range, though the woodwinds might have been a little more forward. A few quiet vocalisations from Nagano notwithstanding, you wouldn't realise that it was recorded live.

That also extends to the performances, which are for the most part smart and stylish. Nagano's approach leans towards 'symphonic' rather than 'poem'. His Dukas is swift and streamlined, and you can forget about midnight churchyards: the opening harp notes of *Danse macabre* are very definitely just down-beats. The low brass in the Mussorgsky sound ponderous rather than menacing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Nagano responds more readily to the less familiar pieces, though I missed Rattle's sense of theatre in Dvořák's *The Noonday Witch*. This witch's icy bass clarinet entry wouldn't chill many spines.

Tamara comes off best: Nagano generates a wonderfully gloomy atmosphere in the opening bars and a powerful sense of forward movement. As Balakirev's seductress weaves her spells, Nagano's players – woodwinds in particular – respond with considerable character, even if they don't quite match Gergiev and the LSO (not to mention Beecham) for flexibility and fire. An entertainingly manic performance of Ives's not particularly spooky (but very Ivesian) 'Hallowe'en' makes a quirky encore. It's nice to see a major label listing the orchestra's personnel in the booklet, too.

Richard Bratby

Dvořák – selected comparison:

BPO, Rattle (9/05) (EMI) 558019-2

Balakirev – selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev (9/16) (LSO) LSO0784

'Jubilo'

JS Bach Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV649^a. Cantata No 147 - Jesu, joy of man's desiring^b. In dulci jubilo, BWV729^a. Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter auf Erden, BWV650^a. Meine Seele erhebt den Herren, BWV648^a. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV645^a. Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, BWV647^a. Wo soll ich fliehen hin, BWV646^a
Corelli Concerto grosso, 'Christmas Concerto', Op 6 No 8 (arr Simon Wright)^c **Fasch** Trumpet Concerto, FWV L:D1^c **Torelli** Suonata con stromenti e tromba, G1^c

Alison Balsom tpt

^bThe Choir of King's College, Cambridge /

Stephen Cleobury ^aorg with ^bTom Etheridge ^{org}

^cAcademy of Ancient Music /

Pavlo Beznosiuk

Warner Classics (P) 9029 59246-5 (54' • DDD)



There tends to be a 'usual suspects' element to most Christmassy discs,

but Alison Balsom's collaboration with the orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music and the organ of King's College, Cambridge, has ultimately inspired an altogether more unexpected programme of works, even while the repertoire isn't necessarily of the headline-grabbing variety.

More of a headline is Balsom's alternation of valveless Baroque trumpet with modern trumpet, and this makes for some lovely timbral contrasts across the programme. The gentler-volumed valveless instrument is a perfect fit for the light-textured Fasch, Torelli and Corelli concertos, while the richer-toned modern trumpet, with its greater ability to inhabit the lower registers, shines alongside Cleobury's organ as it takes the melody for Bach's Schübler Chorales.

True highlights are the Fasch and Torelli concertos, where we get to fully appreciate Balsom's immaculate, singing-toned *clarino* playing to the full. Equally, I was held transfixed through her long, fluid and wonderfully shaped obbligato lines above the Choir of King's College in 'Jesu, joy of man's desiring'.

Less of a highlight for me was Simon Wright's arrangement of Corelli's Op 6 *Christmas* Concerto. This sees the solo trumpet alternate between doubling the violins and soaring above them with new descants and obbligato lines, and it is unquestionably the latter device that works best, most beautifully in the third-movement *Adagio*. Why? Because ultimately a trumpet is still a trumpet, and not a natural blending partner to a string ensemble, meaning that its doubling of the violin lines has the effect of throwing the balance of parts awry, which in turn waters down some of the music's usual stringy zing.

Still, this disc has some wonderful moments, and it's also a rare seasonal offering that doesn't have to be put into hibernation once December is over.

Charlotte Gardner

Read our interview with Alison Balsom on page 10

'Tribute to Evgeny Svetlanov'

DVD

Bartók Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119^a **Prokofiev**

Seven, They Are Seven, Op 30^b. Two Poems,

Op 7^c. **Rachmaninov** The Bells^d

^dTatiana Pavlovskaya ^{sop} ^{bd}Vsevolod Grivnov ^{ten}

^dSergei Leiferkus ^{bar} ^aYefim Bronfman ^{pf}

^{cd}Yurlov State Academic Chorus; State

Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia /

Vladimir Jurowski

Video director **Andy Sommer**

BelAir Classiques (P) DVD BAC107

(84' • NTSC • 16:9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, September 6, 2013



Evgeny Svetlanov was a giant among Soviet conductors. Formerly at the Bolshoi Theatre, from 1965

he was Principal Conductor of the USSR State Symphony Orchestra, which was later renamed the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia. He was fired in 2000 (ostensibly for spending too much time conducting abroad). The orchestra now carries Svetlanov's name (he died in 2002) and this concert was held in the Great Hall of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory on what would have been his 85th birthday. None of this detail is to be found in the DVD booklet, because there is none. The only information we get in BelAir's shoddy presentation comes via a brief interview with Vladimir Jurowski, Chief Conductor since 2011, exclusively about Rachmaninov's *The Bells*.

The Bells was a Svetlanov speciality – he conducted it just a fortnight before his death. Jurowski also gets under its skin, drawing an intense, brooding performance. Jurowski is swifter than Svetlanov's recordings, his precise conducting – and mouthing all the words – earning a disciplined response from the Yurlov State Academic Chorus. The soloists are very fine. Vsevolod Grivnov's bright timbre is miles away from a reedy Russian tenor and Tatiana Pavlovskaya's ripe soprano is perfectly poised in the 'Golden Bells' movement. Best of all is Sergei Leiferkus, whose flinty baritone is still in remarkable shape in the concluding 'Iron Bell' section.

The concert has a curious running order. Following the Rachmaninov, we cut very suddenly to a burly performance of Bartók's Third Piano Concerto by Yefim Bronfman before ending with a pair of Prokofiev curiosities. The early *Two Poems* for female chorus and orchestra and the brief, punchy cantata *Seven, They Are Seven* are well performed, if unmemorable. **Mark Pullinger**

Mozart's Mass in C minor

Masaaki Suzuki talks to David Vickers about the mysteries surrounding Mozart's great Mass

Mozart's abandoned 'great' Mass in C minor (K427) is even more of an enigma than his unfinished Requiem. He must have worked on its score some time between his marriage to Constanze Weber at Vienna's Stephansdom (August 4, 1782) and writing in a letter to his father (January 4, 1783) – see 'The historical view' below – that he was halfway through the composition of a Mass. Nobody knows why Mozart abandoned what appears to have been a plan to set the entire Latin Ordinary; perhaps he realised its ornate blend of Italianate operatic solos and Handelian choral fugues was unsuitable for liturgical use in the wake of Joseph II's austere clerical reforms, which had pressured almost all churches in Austria to reduce and simplify their music-making to more modest proportions.

Masaaki Suzuki speaks with gently glowing enthusiasm about Mozart's score, the issues raised by its incomplete state and his hopes that this new recording for BIS is an insightful artistic interpretation. We meet just around the corner from the Barbican during a weekend residency of Bach concerts and events, and I wonder if Suzuki senses an affinity between Mozart's most ambitious sacred work and the contrapuntally-grounded aesthetic of the Baroque choral repertoire that has hallmarked Bach Collegium Japan's career so far. 'There is the famous story that Mozart was much affected by hearing one of Bach's motets during a visit to Leipzig, but that was some years later than the C minor Mass was written. In comparison, Mozart's music can look so simple on the page, but in other ways the C minor Mass has some fascinating parallels with the B minor Mass: choral movements with incredible polyphonic structure, a wonderful contrast between its movements, and of course a beautiful "Et incarnatus est"!'

Mozart never finished the string parts for this rapturous soprano aria featuring a *concertante* trio of flute, oboe and bassoon – which raises doubts about whether he ever performed it. Suzuki chuckles and suggests 'maybe the missing string parts could have been filled in by Mozart improvising at the organ? At least that's what I want to think – that it was somehow performed in Salzburg in 1783, even without the strings.' Considering that Suzuki has an excellent woodwind trio and Carolyn Sampson at his disposal, is this a moment where he allows himself to luxuriate in such incredibly radiant music? 'It's important to capture the emotion, but of course it shouldn't be



Masaaki Suzuki speculates on one of the great unfinished Mass settings

self-indulgently slow. We tried to allow the music to have a natural flow: it needs a very heavenly sound as if it's floating in the air – like breathing in and out – and these upward sequences rising higher each time are a meaningful dialogue between the voice and the concertante trio – not a competition but a harmonious unity.'

Many more problems in the sources mean numerous details have to be decided by editors, each one of whom has varying musicological agendas and their own personal ideas about what Mozart might have envisaged. Accordingly, there is no such thing as 'the' score of the C minor Mass, but several alternative editions that present radically dissimilar completions of missing orchestra parts; moreover, some editors attempt to reconfigure some choral passages into double-choir versions, and some have even attempted to complete the entire Latin Ordinary by providing music for the rest of the *Credo* and adding a plausible *Agnus Dei*. Suzuki compared several of these different editions before making a choice. 'I decided to follow Franz Beyer's edition [published by Amadeus: 1989] – although I don't much agree with his addition of an *Agnus Dei* that recapitulates the *Kyrie* music, so we only present the movements that Mozart wrote music for.



The historical view

Mozart in Vienna

Letter to his father, January 4, 1783

Concerning the vow, it is quite true; indeed it did not flow from my pen without premeditation. The score of half a Mass, which is still lying here on my desk waiting to be finished, is the best proof that I really made the promise.

Julian Rushton

Mozart: The Master Musicians (OUP: 2006)

Composing it was a propitiatory sacrifice, for neither Vienna nor Salzburg required such an immense liturgical work; its dimensions, had it been finished, might have matched those of Bach's Mass in B minor.

Robert Levin

Preface to his reconstruction and completion (Carus, Stuttgart: 2006)

Though infant mortality was then commonplace and accepted more stoically than now, is it possible that Raimund's grieving father turned away from the Mass as too painful to complete?


I have conducted the work using different editions in the past, and I thought in some places one edition's ideas are better than another one, so for the recording we made a few very small changes to little orchestral details that we liked better.'

Of course, some things are fixed with more stability in Mozart's original autograph score but are still open to contradictory artistic interpretations. We discuss the imposing double-chorus 'Qui tollis', and how different conductors interpret (or misinterpret) the *Largo* marking, Suzuki enthusing 'this is very clearly modelled on the Baroque tradition we know from Bach and Handel, and in their time there was often a dotted rhythm for "Qui tollis peccata mundi", where the text talks about sinfulness, and the dotted rhythm conveys the punishment and authority of the king – in other words, God's judgement on sinners. I think Mozart probably takes one step

'The fascination of Mozart is that his music always comes easily into your heart' – Masaaki Suzuki

further than his Baroque forbears and wants an even sharper energy. The dotted rhythms in the strings mean you can play with or without rests, but this is deliberately a very old-style Mozart has chosen, and I think the use of rests is incredibly important – the strings have to detach their notes. It's also in places like this that the German pronunciation of Latin helps quite massively: "Qvi tollis" rather than "Kwee tollis". It gives the up-beats more definition and energy. The same thing is true with the hard "g" in "[Gratias] agimus tibi".

As we share our mutual admiration at many passages in the score, Suzuki enthuses about how Mozart's use of structure in some movements is close to classical sonata form. "Laudamus te" is so theatrical, and I love the recapitulation when the strings gradually lead us back to the exposition theme, with the singer sneaking in on a long note that evolves into the return of the original theme. I think after Mozart it became an increasingly difficult challenge for the next generation of composers like Beethoven to find fresh and inventive ways to produce a recapitulation. Before Mozart it was easy to just begin the first idea again, but for Mozart sonata form became a useful package for communicating ideas.' Those ideas, of course, can also be profoundly emotional – contradicting Stravinsky's infamous barb that Mozart's church music was little more than superficial confectionary. Suzuki agrees: 'For me, the fascination of Mozart is that even when there are sometimes quite complicated polyphonic lines, his music always comes easily into your heart, and feels spontaneous, natural and honest.'

With the enormous project to record Bach's complete vocal works very nearly finished, and both of Mozart's largest sacred works now under his belt, I ask where Suzuki's interests will take him next. 'Actually I've always been interested in settings of the Mass that were not necessarily designed with only a liturgical purpose, but that might have been at least partly concert music that stretched the creative invention and skill of the composers. Maybe you can say this for several works we have recorded during our career: Monteverdi's *Missa In illo tempore*, Bach's Mass in B minor, and now Mozart's Mass in C minor. So the next logical step is Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*.' 

► Read our review of Masaaki Suzuki's Mozart C minor Mass on page 93







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MASAAKI SUZUKI

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INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW, JANUARY 2015

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 **GRAMOPHONE** DECEMBER 2016 69

Chamber



Philip Clark reviews a 1974 performance by Julius Eastman:

'His raison d'être for establishing melodic loops was to torpedo their progress through improvisation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**



Harriet Smith listens to the Escher Quartet's Mendelssohn:

'They combine highly disciplined playing, communicative warmth and a clear empathy for the composer in hand' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**

Babajanian • Clarke • Martin

'Trios from Our Homelands'

Babajanian Piano Trio **Clarke** Piano Trio **Martin**

Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises

Lincoln Trio

Cedille © CDR90000 165 (64' • DDD)



It's not exactly a recipe for cohesion – a collection of little-known works from

Armenia, England and Switzerland, representing the players' countries of origin. Not for nothing, though, do the members of the Chicago-based Lincoln Trio pride themselves on their programme-making skills. Each of these pieces draws on folk music without compromising its individuality; each is a mix of lyricism and biting early-20th-century dissonance. Most importantly, each is fascinating in its own right, and deserves far more attention than it gets.

Among them Rebecca Clarke's 1921 Trio stands out. Here is a piece as inventive as it is structurally rigorous, consistently impressive in its inter-related themes. But it is the music's intensity – largely carried by the pungent, late-Romantic harmonies – that grabs us by the shoulders, at least when conveyed as it is here, without inhibition.

Unlike Clarke, who struggled her whole life for artistic success, the Armenian composer Arno Babajanian was a hero in his native land. And yet his music, while less adventurous, similarly evokes an air of deep sadness. It comes to the fore in this trio, which draws on the world of folk, while channelling something of Rachmaninov's songfulness.

So it's perhaps just as well that Frank Martin's *Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises* takes us elsewhere entirely: a world poised somewhere between America and Ireland. Ironically, there's nothing very Swiss about this Swiss piece, which you could see as a problem. In between studying the works of Bach, César Franck, American jazz and folk music and the

rhythmic theories of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze – the founder of the eurhythmics system of teaching music – Martin never quite got round to developing his own voice. Still, there's much to appreciate in this music: the rhythmic ingenuity, its sense of charm. The Lincoln give it all the punch and vigour it deserves but it is the poetry of their playing elsewhere in the programme that really makes this disc. **Hannah Nepil**

Bartók

String Quartets – No 2, Op 17 Sz67;

No 4, Sz91; No 6, Sz114

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2235 (79' • DDD)



Relistening to the Emerson Quartet's Gramophone Award-winning Bartók cycle

for September's Classics Reconsidered, I was reminded of how, as recently as 1989, it was still considered remarkable for a Bartók quartet recording to be both accurate and pleasant on the ear. How things change: a generation on, this new recording from the Jerusalem Quartet is precise without ever being inflexible, and at the same time (or so it comes across) effortlessly, luminously beautiful.

It's not just a question of tone quality, though the Jerusalem make some gorgeous sounds. Listen to the misty quality that cellist Kyril Zlotnikov and viola player Ori Kam, in particular, bring to the opening of the Second Quartet's finale; equally, near the same movement's climax, how firmly and eloquently all four players voice the partially double-stopped answering phrases. There's an assurance about this playing that's satisfying in its own right, giving the Second Quartet an overall feeling of blossoming lyricism and the Fourth an almost playful sense of swing. The acoustic is generous but not exaggeratedly resonant.

It's in the Sixth Quartet that the doubts really begin to crystallise, and much depends upon what you want from a Bartók

quartet recording. I felt a trace of stiffness in those *meno mosso* opening solos, reinforcing a suspicion that the group isn't, perhaps, finding as much strangeness in this music as certain older recordings do (think of the Végh or Takács Quartets). Work in progress? Hopefully we'll hear more Bartók from the Jerusalem in future. But meanwhile, these are civilised, outward-looking readings, placing the music firmly in the Classical-Romantic tradition, and there are plenty of listeners who'll respond warmly to playing of such sincerity and beauty. **Richard Bratby**

Beethoven

Complete Violin Sonatas

Pierre Fouchenneret *vn* **Romain Descharnes** *pf*

Aparté © ③ AP129 (3h 57' • DDD)

Recorded live at Le Trident, Cherbourg-en-Cotentin, France, March 5-9, 2015



This set of the 10 Beethoven violin sonatas took me by surprise. Let's start

with the sound, which is exceptionally well balanced and clear for a concert recording – superior even to Ibragimova and Tiberghien's superb series from the Wigmore Hall. Not only that, but there's nary a muffled cough or the faintest rustling from the audience. In fact, with applause edited out, I don't think I'd know these were live recordings had they not been labelled as such.

The bigger and better surprise, though, is the unaffected, highly accomplished musicianship of Pierre Fouchenneret and Romain Descharnes, neither of whom I'd heard before. Fouchenneret's tone is warm yet finely focused and with spot-on intonation throughout. Descharnes's touch is unfailingly elegant; he renders even the thickest passages with crystalline clarity. Together, they are in total sympathy, phrasing with an affectionate attention to detail as well as a feeling for architecture. Start, for example, with the slow movement



'Highly accomplished musicianship': Pierre Fouchenneret and Romain Descharmes play Beethoven

of the *Spring* Sonata, where both players use the copious ornamental figuration to highly expressive effect while maintaining the integrity of the melodic line. Or turn to the finale to hear how they invest each successive idea with such distinctive character yet make everything flow together with such ease.

My one reservation – and it's a major one, I'm afraid – is that Fouchenneret and Descharmes too often disregard Beethoven's instructions to play softly. Compare their reading of the finale of Op 12 No 3 with Faust and Melnikov's, in which the opening tune is hushed with punchy *sforzandos*, as written; Fouchenneret and Descharmes are merely loud. Time and again, particularly in the early sonatas, this narrow dynamic range results in lost opportunities. Surely the *Andante* of Op 23 would have been considerably more playful and charming if it had been observed that nearly the entire movement is marked *piano* or *pianissimo* with only sporadic *forte* outbursts. (Again, Faust and Melnikov get this right.)

Happily, the later works display more satisfying dynamic exactitude. Fouchenneret and Descharmes's effervescent way with Op 30 No 3 left me positively giddy with delight. The *Kreutzer*

is also mightily impressive. Never mind that Variation 2 in the second movement feels slightly étude-like, their interpretation has a thrillingly firm dramatic grip, as well as unusual poise, even in the galloping impetuosity of the *Presto* finale. Op 96 is perhaps finer still. Listen to the development section of the first movement (beginning around 5'14"), where the players give the impression of feeling their way, awestruck, into uncharted emotional territory. The *Adagio*, too, is achingly intimate, and the finale encompasses a world in itself, one full of smiling spontaneity and song.

Faust and Melnikov remain my top choice for a modern recording of these sonatas, but Fouchenneret and Descharmes are absolutely worth a listen. I'll certainly be returning to their superb accounts of the last three sonatas as well as the *Spring*, and I eagerly look forward to hearing more from them. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Selected comparisons:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (8/10, 12/10, 7/11)

(WIGM) WHLIVE0036, 0041 & 0045 (oas)

Faust, Melnikov (10/10) (HARM) HMC90 2025/7

Brahms

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99.

Vier ernste Gesänge, Op 121

Alexander Baillie vc John Thwaites pf

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0158 (71' • DDD)



Talk about spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar. Actually, don't: the art of balancing

piano and strings on a chamber recording is no small challenge. But engineering standards today are generally so high that we expect, almost as a matter of course, to hear both instruments clearly balanced in a lucid and natural-sounding acoustic.

This disc, sadly, shows just how hard that is to achieve. The piano, remote and muffled, sounds like it's in a different room. The cello's lower strings boom out so aggressively that at times they all but drown the piano, and the general ambience (the venue is given as the Gert Hecher Klavier-Atelier in Vienna) is muddy and drab. It is hard to imagine, say, BIS or Hyperion releasing something that sounds like this.

It's a huge pity, because the basic idea here is so appealing. Each of the three works is performed by John Thwaites on a different historic German or Viennese piano dating from Brahms's own time: a

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Rönisch from around 1860, and instruments by Ehrbar and Streicher from the late 1870s. The Rönisch seems to have a lighter tone, almost reminiscent of a fortepiano; the Ehrbar and Streicher are noticeably richer.

Unfortunately the recorded sound makes it difficult to appreciate the subtleties, as well as constituting a major distraction from Baillie and Thwaites's ardent if occasionally four-square performances. The Second Sonata, with its more generally high-lying cello-writing, comes across best. Overall, though, this is a good idea botched in the execution. It's not entirely damning with faint praise to say that Thwaites's thoughtful and comprehensive booklet-notes would be the best reason to buy this recording. **Richard Bratby**

Bruckner · Zemlinsky

Bruckner String Quintet. Intermezzo

Zemlinsky String Quintet

Bartholdy Quintet

AVI-Music Ⓢ AVI8553348 (69' • DDD)



The Bartholdy Quintet was formed in 2009 as a two-violin string quintet, and

I can't, off the top of my head, think of another permanent ensemble devoted to this surprisingly masterpiece-rich area of the chamber repertoire. Alternating first violin and viola parts between players, they nonetheless sound entirely at ease with each other. Quintet textures can easily become congested, but not here: one of the joys of their first recording as a group is how alert these players are to instrumental colour, and how clearly but unfussily the inner parts come through.

Bruckner's only String Quintet needs more than just instrumental colour, of course, and the Bartholdy Quintet supply it. Without ever losing a sense of forward movement, they open up real space and atmosphere around this glorious music – even more so (I felt) than the Fitzwilliam Quartet in their *Gramophone* Award-nominated recent account. Those questioning first phrases have room to breathe, but nothing here ever sounds static or cold. Ideas are vividly characterised and that instinct for tone-colour comes repeatedly into play, whether the group is hurling gleaming unisons across the climax of the first movement's exposition or drawing the sound tenderly in around the closing paragraphs of the great *Adagio*. They make considerable sense of Bruckner's stop-start tempo changes, and

not without humour: the Scherzo's Trio section really smiles.

The coupling is enjoyable too: the surviving two movements of Zemlinsky's D minor Quintet of 1896. The Bartholdys' account is both lively and transparent; they bring out the Brahmsian overtones of its winding streams of thirds and sixths, and attack the scherzo-like finale with enormous zest. Warm sound complements a rewarding recorded debut: thoroughly worth hearing. **Richard Bratby**

Bruckner – selected comparison:

Fitzwilliam Qt, Boyd (12/15) (LINN) CKD402

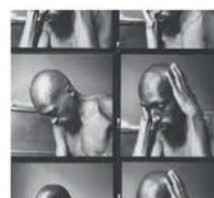
Eastman

Feminine

SEM Ensemble

Frozen Reeds Ⓢ FR6 (72' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Academy of the Holy Names, Albany, NY, November 6, 1974



Gramophone readers will forever associate Julius Eastman with Peter Maxwell

Davies's own 1970 recording of *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, where Eastman's gravelly voice, all dark and brooding, created a definitive interpretation of George III's descent into the abyss. Readers elsewhere will more likely namecheck Eastman as the keyboard player in disco outfit Dinosaur L; and, had you lived in New York City during the 1970s, you might have encountered Eastman playing jazz piano in his bassist brother Gerry Eastman's band or performing as a singer-for-hire in Baroque oratorios – or unpicking new compositions under the batons of Pierre Boulez, Lukas Foss or Zubin Mehta.

But all this frenzied activity was, you feel, something he did to pass the time when he wasn't composing. Eastman's own music might at first feel allied to the early minimalism of Riley, Glass or Reich. But Eastman was black, gay and proud in a new-music scene that was overwhelmingly white; and, as much as he was fascinated by minimalism and by Cage and Feldman, whose music he performed regularly, his cultural antennae pointed elsewhere. His *raison d'être* for establishing melodic loops was to torpedo their progress through improvisation.

Feminine – written in 1974 and performed that year by Petr Kotik's SEM Ensemble with Eastman on piano – is a typical Eastman construct. His notation fused the approach Terry Riley had pioneered with *In C* – musicians working through a sequence of melodic fragments –

with what jazz musicians would term a 'lead sheet': a melodic skeleton around which to improvise. The score is available online for free download; but connecting this ornate 72-minute performance, rendered by a mixed ensemble of wind, strings and percussion, with that sketchy five-page short score, much of it on one or two staves, might require a leap of faith.

A stark, syncopated riff for vibraphone moves against interrupting slabs of harmony and flare-ups of melodic gossip for other unspecified instruments. Indications written into the score such as 'displace by one 16th note' might drop hints about what will follow, but nothing can prepare you for the ecstatic ritual as it actually unfolds. Mechanically shaken sleigh bells, a gizmo of Eastman's own invention, provide a failsafe pulse – and, a groove now rolling, he acts as a bandleader in the Duke Ellington mould, cajoling and shaping a performance from behind the keyboard.

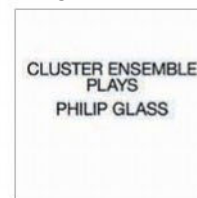
With the vibraphone setting the mood, Eastman initially holds back before gradually asserting himself, bolstering the basic harmonies but then extending the harmony beyond itself – flooding the senses with churchy harmonies or focusing in on one other instrumental line, teasing it out of phase with a cavorting boogie-woogie line. There's a moment of sheer magic, around 48 minutes in, as fresh harmonic material begins to glow from inside the ensemble. Now orgiastic joy and snarling defiance coexist – which is exactly how Eastman liked it. **Philip Clark**

Glass

Music in Contrary Motion. Music in Fifths. Music in Similar Motion. Music With Changing Parts. Two Pages

Cluster Ensemble

Orange Mountain Ⓢ Ⓢ OMM0109 (145' • DDD)



In his recent memoir, *Words Without Music* (Faber, 7/15), Philip Glass was keen to put

paid to the rumour that his music is all about repetition: 'My music is about variation', he insisted. These five early works might leave those agnostic about the whole minimalist cause begging to differ – but the Cluster Ensemble place this music into its proper historical context, a return to the atmosphere and puritan sound of Glass's first recordings: an antidote to the well-oiled, manufactured orchestration of his recent work. The austere mood music and shrill tessitura of the earliest piece, *Two Pages* (1968), might leave those schooled

only in latter-day Glass in shock; but this is a welcome reminder that, long before the catch-all label 'minimalism' existed, this was modernist music too – as determined as Milton Babbitt to sweep away old-school expressive habits.

As Glass was writing these pieces, experiments with reconfiguring keyboard sounds in the recording studio were gathering pace. A journey that began with Glenn Gould's 1955 *Goldberg Variations* would arrive, by the late 1960s, at Miles Davis experimenting with multiple electronic keyboards and Walter Carlos wiring Bach through a Moog synthesiser. And it's no coincidence that Glass moulded these exploratory pieces around electric keyboards, which were easily accessible and also portable around loft spaces, and felt like the relevant hardware on which to create a new music in New York City.

Glass and Michael Riesman's original 1975 *Two Pages* clocked in at 18 minutes, and the Cluster Ensemble's Ivan Šiller and Fero Király set a moderately speedier pace than Glass's own, the extra 10-minute duration explained by the musicians rotating longer around each module before jumping to the next repeat. The clarity of that original recording was at best so-so; but here the graphically close-up recording means harmonic points of arrival and jabbing bass notes are not merely heard – the physical throb of the instruments shakes you bodily.

Moving through *Music in Fifths*, *Music in Contrary Motion* and *Music in Similar Motion* (all 1969) towards *Music With Changing Parts* (1970), you realise that, in the space of a year, Glass underwent a process of evolution – adding the fifth, then inner parts – that took harmony a few hundred years. By the time you reach *Similar Motion* there's a knowing sexiness to the harmony that had no place in *Two Pages*, and Šiller and Király move by stealth from the clean-cut opening arpeggios towards Glass's coquettish chromatics, letting the music tell its own story. The Glass Ensemble's own 1971 recording of *Changing Parts*, with its rough-hewn temperament and scuffed ensemble, is forever the period piece. The Cluster Ensemble's neat, carefully prepared performance – the two keyboard players now joined by a mixed ensemble of reeds, brass and mallet percussion – highlights incongruous leaps in the harmony supporting Glass's notion that his music is about deviation, not repetition. This set obviously outgins Glass's own recordings – in terms of notes if not of historical aura – and, given that it's been released on his own label, the composer clearly agrees.

Philip Clark

Krogulski · Nowakowski

G

Krogulski Piano Octet, Op 6^a

Nowakowski Piano Quintet, Op 17

³Jan Krzeszowiec fl ³Radosław Soroka cl

⁴Erzhan Kulibaev, Lena Neudauer vns

Katarzyna Budnik-Gałązka va Marcin Zdunik vc

Sławomir Rozlach db Nelson Goerner pf

Fryderyk Chopin Institute © NIFCCD105

(61' • DDD)



Józef Nowakowski (1800-65) and Józef Krogulski (1815-42).

Even in their native Poland their names are hardly known. On this evidence they should have international recognition, for both works are well able to stand comparison with the chamber music of the 'Great Composers' of the period.

Nowakowski's E flat major Quintet of 1833, considered lost for decades, has the same instrumentation as Hummel's Op 87 Quintet (in the same key) and Schubert's *Trout* Quintet. If you like these two masterpieces, I guarantee you will fall for this one. The first of its four movements (15 minutes with exposition repeat) has a second subject which the booklet identifies with some justification as 'one of the most beautiful in the whole of the 19th-century Polish chamber literature'. Then comes a fiery C minor *Presto* (performing the function of a scherzo), a Romance and a sonata-rondo finale. Nowakowski, by all accounts, was an accomplished pianist (Chopin took a keen interest in his music) and Nelson Goerner is kept on the qui vive throughout. If he is the de facto star of proceedings, rightly setting the pace and tone, his partners match him every step of the way, and in the thrilling note-spinning finale do so with palpable glee.

It is this same youthful camaraderie that permeates the performance of Krogulski's four-movement Octet, another winner which must surely find its way into the regular repertoire. Composed in 1834, it seems to have been modelled on Hummel's Septet in D minor and was written when its wunderkind composer-pianist was a mere 19 years old (he died, even younger than Chopin, from tuberculosis). Goerner again has his work cut out, a task in which he revels with exuberant dexterity, throwing down the gauntlet in the scintillating first movement and *à la bohémienne* finale, a challenge which the others (notably the flute and first violin) meet with relish.

This superbly recorded disc is the most enjoyable chamber music disc – and the most interesting discovery – to come my way for some time. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Mendelssohn

String Quartets – No 5, Op 44 No 3; No 6, Op 80.

Four Pieces, Op 81 – No 3, Capriccio; No 4, Fugue

Escher Quartet

BIS © BIS2160 (71' • DDD/DSD)



With this, we reach the concluding disc of the Mendelssohn cycle by the Escher Quartet.

As with previous instalments (8/15 & 10/15), they combine highly disciplined playing, communicative warmth and a clear empathy for the composer in hand. They are particularly effective in the first movement of Op 44 No 3, where the unison octave writing is dispatched with great unanimity, contrasting with the grace of the opening itself. Compared to them, the Zemlinsky Quartet are perhaps a little too breathless. In the second movement, too, the Escher are steadier than some but this allows them to imbue the fugal writing with immense clarity. However, when compared with the Parker Quartet, the Escher seem distinctly less daring at the quieter end of the spectrum and it's the former who observe to best effect the movement's *Assai leggiero vivace* marking. The gloriously anguished slow movement is effectively an aria for first violin: the Escher relish this and give Mendelssohn's delicious dissonances due immediacy before all is banished in the quicksilver finale, though again, compared to the Parker, the Escher sound just a touch deliberate, though their ensemble is faultless.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the verve and precision with which the Escher launch into the last quartet, Op 80, and their sense of living this music is infectious, the *Allegro assai* second movement propelled forward by the most airborne of accentuation. But this is a much-recorded work and others offer still more, whether the emotionally unfettered Ebène or the Elias, who find an unmatched level of desperation in the searing *Adagio*. And the Escher's finale is, to my mind, just a little too slow to realise Mendelssohn's febrile vision. Of the two remaining pieces from Op 81 (the first two appeared in the Escher's second volume – 10/15), the Capriccio has a real lilt, while the Fugue possesses tremendous clarity and a sense of reactivity between the players. **Harriet Smith**

String Quartet No 5 – selected comparisons:

Zemlinsky Qt (1/11) (PRAG) DSD250 269

Parker Qt (4/16) (NIMB) NI6327

String Quartet No 6 – selected comparison:

Ebène Qt (4/13) (VIRG) 464546-2

String Quartet No 6, Four Pieces – selected comparison:

Elias Qt (5/07) (ALTO) ALC1303*



'The Dante Quartet speak Stanford's lyrical, lucid but slightly reticent late-Romantic language like natives'

Mozart

String Quintets - No 5, K593 (two versions of finale); No 6, K614. Quintet Fragment, K515c
Chilingirian Quartet with **Yuko Inoue** va
 CRD © CRD3523 (61' • DDD)



The Chilingirian's cycle of Mozart's six string quintets has been nine years in the

making and I'm sorry to have missed the earlier instalments. This third and final volume (once again with second viola Yuko Inoue) presents the last two quintets, from December 1790 and April 1791, in thoroughly worthwhile performances, along with two further rarities: both finales to K593 (Mozart's falling chromatic 'tag' was altered by a well-meaning publisher to something more jagged and Haydnesque when the work was printed after the composer's death) and the fragment of an exposition in A minor that Mozart left aside for whatever reason.

What a masterpiece K593 is, with its surprise reprise of the slow introduction towards the end of the first movement and its sublime, hymnic *Adagio*. Even if K614 doesn't quite scale the same heights of

inspiration, it's odd that Hugh Wood's long booklet essay should damn it unequivocally as 'demonstrably inferior to its immediate predecessors' – a case of cognitive dissonance between musicology and marketing, perhaps. Elsewhere Wood seems to play out some sort of enmity with Cliff Eisen, professor of all things Mozartian at King's College London; I don't know what might have caused their falling out but surely a CD booklet is not quite the place to rehearse it.

Both performances are fully adequate to the challenges of these works and would appear, from the occasional minor squeek or scrape, to have been laid down in long takes with a minimum of patching, the better to convey the sweep of each movement. The sound is analytical rather than generous and the only real disappointment is the lack of second-half repeats; but then, there aren't many other recordings of these hidden gems and some spot-check comparative sets don't do the repeats either. Nevertheless, the sheer pleasure this music provides is enough to make your reviewer seek out the previous volumes; if they are of the same standard then this cycle should surely compare well with classics by the Amadeus Quartet (DG) or Grumiaux Trio (Philips), and even with

more modern ones such as the Nash Ensemble (Hyperion).

David Threshier

Onslow

'String Quintets, Vol 1'
 String Quintets - No 20, Op 45; No 26, Op 67
Elan Quintet
 Naxos © 8 573600 (65' • DDD)



Amateur chamber musicians will need no introduction to Georges Onslow. One

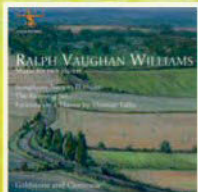
of his 30-odd two-cello quintets usually gets pulled from the bag when a group is looking for something to play after the Schubert C major: not exactly a flattering comparison for any composer. These works are a slightly different matter. Apparently inspired by a meeting with Dragonetti, Onslow wrote four quintets with double bass, Op 67 among them, and authorised an optional bass part in several others – an option the Elan Quintet has taken here in Op 45.

And, it has to be said, these five players make a beguiling case for this music. Their ensemble sound is attractive: it is warm and



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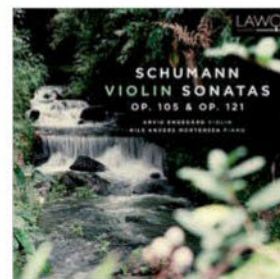
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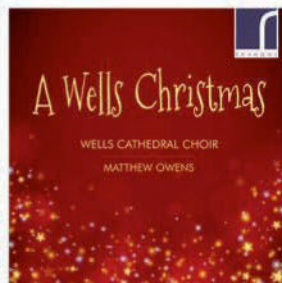
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OP. 105 & OP. 121

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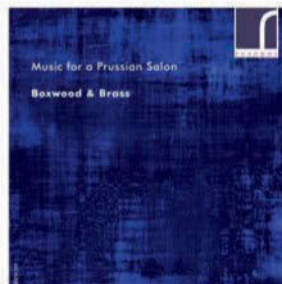
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Matthew Owens conductor



To Bethlehem:
Carols and Motets for Christmas
Kantorei of Kansas City
Chris Munce conductor



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Music for a Prussian Salon:
Franz Tausch in Context
Boxwood & Brass



The Celebrated Distin Family
The Prince Regent's Band

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slightly inward which, combined with the small-room acoustic, makes for a real chamber-music feeling. Listen to the tender, almost viola-like tone of Dmitri Tsirin's cello in the *Andante* of Op 67 or leader Benjamin Scherer Quesada's sweet, playful asides in the same work's Scherzo. These sound like five individuals in conversation, never (as sometimes happens with these forces) a miniature string orchestra.

That intimate quality bathes both these essentially Classical (stylistically, they're slightly closer to early Beethoven than Mendelssohn) works in an understated but unmistakably Romantic glow. The Elans are excellent both at capturing the sometimes guileless charm of Onslow's ideas, and knowing when to let things darken: the solo bass opening of Op 45 is a proper Wolf's Glen moment. Tempi are on the generous side, and if occasionally they feel a little underpowered, this is playing of great charm. Op 45 is a premiere recording, so Onslow fans needn't hesitate. Newcomers, meanwhile, may find themselves quietly impressed – like Schumann, Chopin and Liszt before them – by what Onslow has to say. **Richard Bratby**

Pleyel

String Quartets – Op 41 No 1;
Op 41 No 2; Op 42 No 1; Op 42 No 2
Authentic Quartet
Hungaroton © HCD32783 (62' • DDD)



Ignaz Pleyel is one of those figures who seems to pop up everywhere: as both composition student of Haydn and his (it seems reasonably friendly) professional rival in London; as a music publisher and founder of the famous Paris piano firm; as builder of the original Salle Pleyel and eventually the father-in-law of Camille Moke – the beauty whose fickle affections inspired the young Hector Berlioz to dress up in a frock and contemplate murder. Contemporaries rated Pleyel on a level with Haydn: 'both these composers are men of first-rate talents', wrote the *Public Advertiser* of London in January 1792.

I wouldn't go quite that far. These four string quartets, apparently dating from around 1792, are concise works, each comprising a sonata *Allegro* followed by one or two shorter movements based on an 'Air écossais' [*sic*] – Pleyel was tapping into the same market that Haydn would exploit in his own Scottish folksong settings. They're never less than well made, and there's

plenty of imagination here: the folksong finales, in particular, have an engagingly jaunty lift to them. But even Pleyel's most ambitious development sections, such as the first movement of Op 42 No 1, don't come close to matching his teacher's capacity for fantasy or surprise.

Amiable, unaffected music, then, in – for the most part – amiable, unaffected performances. The Hungarian-based Authentic Quartet play as if they're a small orchestra and their vibrato-free period-instrument tone has a matte quality, despite the resonant church acoustic. That's probably liveable with; you might need to make further allowances for scrambled passagework and leader Zsolt Kalló's occasionally sour intonation. But if you're keen to discover this music, it'll probably do for now. **Richard Bratby**

Reich

WTC 9/11. *Different Trains*
Tana Quartet
Megadisc © MDC7877 (43' • DDD)



Steve Reich began transforming speech into music in the mid-1960s. I vividly remember my first encounter with *Come Out* (1966) as a young music student, and how my initial reaction of dismissive exasperation quickly changed to one of mesmerised delight. *Come Out* worked its magic through overlapping loops of the spoken phrase 'come out to show them' moving out of phase, so that the actual meaning of the words became subsumed in musical abstraction.

In *Different Trains* (1988), Reich drastically changed course, using the cadence of spoken phrases to generate melodic ideas. The problem here is that the highly charged expressive content of the words is rarely matched by the musical outcome, and particularly when the subject is genocide – or, in the case of *WTC 9/11* (2010), terrorism.

Both *Different Trains* and *WTC 9/11* were written for, premiered and recorded by the Kronos Quartet (Nonesuch, 6/89, 11/11). The former has since been recorded by several other ensembles as well; but, as it is reliant on an existing soundtrack consisting of spoken phrases, special effects and a pre-recorded multitrack part for string quartet, the room for interpretative license is slim.

For this Megadisc release, the Quatour Tana worked with audio engineer Philippe Muller. Both works were recorded in a

concert-hall setting with the pre-recorded portions played back on ATOHM loudspeakers while the quartet played live, as it were. The result gives the quartet more sonic presence, which – for better or for worse, depending on how you feel about these works – highlights the musical content rather than the texts. The Tana are not as rhythmically taut as the Kronos (or the London Steve Reich Ensemble in *Different Trains* – Warner, 11/11), but make up for this with playing that's admirably supple and tonally variegated.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Saint-Saëns

Piano Quintet, Op 14^a. String Quartet No 1, Op 112
^aAndrea Lumachi db ^aAndrea Lucchesini pf
Cremona Quartet
Audite © AUDITE97 728 (64' • DDD)



The choice of the first of Saint-Saëns's two string quartets is a rather apt pairing with the Quintet in that the early Op 14 was written to showcase the keyboard skill of the 20-year-old composer, while Op 112 was written for (and dedicated to) the Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. Not that the other parts in these works are negligible (far from it) but the piano in the Quintet and the first violin in the Quartet are the dominant protagonists.

This is especially true of the former, which boasts a brilliant piano part (it is easy to imagine the work being arranged as a concerto). The first of the four movements overflows with a super-abundance of ideas, the second is a sustained and moving *Andante*, the third a *perpetuum mobile* that hurtles along and put me in mind of Alkan's *Le chemin de fer*, and the fugal finale is reminiscent of Schumann's Piano Quintet.

The String Quartet, like the Quintet boasting a lengthy first movement, is less obviously virtuoso, though much of the writing keeps all four players on their toes, not least in the teasing syncopations of the second movement (*Molto allegro quasi presto*). The exception is the slow third movement, which surely gives the lie to the idea that Saint-Saëns was all glitter and superficial emotion. Here is one of his most deeply felt and intensely personal statements.

The Quartetto di Cremona play with zest, bright colours, great assurance and a tight ensemble that can change direction on a sixpence. Andrea Lucchesini is the excellent pianist in the Quintet and gives Ian Brown a run for his money in the

Nash Ensemble's benchmark recording, but is perhaps a little too forwardly placed in the balance.

Andrea Lumachi (double bass) is billed as playing in the Quintet's third movement, yet there is no double-bass part in the original score. Or is there? In fact, for some weird reason Saint-Saëns provided an independent part for the instrument with instructions that it remain *tacet* in movements 1, 2 and 4! There is no explanation for this unique (and, in this case, barely audible) addition anywhere in the booklet-note, which, moreover, misquotes Berlioz and assumes that its readers will have degrees in both musicology and waffle. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Piano Quintet – selected comparison:

Nash Ens (T/O5) (HYPE) CDA67431/2

Schumann

Piano Quintet, Op 44^a. Märchenbilder, Op 113^b.
Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102^c

The Benvenue Fortepiano Trio with

^aCarla Moore ^{vn}^{ab}Jodi Levitz ^{va}

Avie © AV2365 (60' • DDD)



The Benvenue Fortepiano Trio (and friends) tear into the opening of

Schumann's Quintet with gusto, making the most of the composer's *Allegro brillante* marking, then pull hard on the brakes for the lyrical second theme, whose beauty is enhanced by some exquisitely applied portamento. Not all the sounds are so attractive, however. There are various spots of iffy intonation (at 2'05", for example) and the tone of the upper strings can be gratefully whiny in high-lying passages.

I'm troubled, too, by the use of rubato in the second movement; while musical in its own right, it works against the march-like feeling Schumann specifies. A more convincing balance between pliant phrasing and metric stability is achieved by the musicians of La Gaia Scienza (Winter & Winter, 5/06). The Italian ensemble's exuberant interpretation of the Scherzo is also more pleasurable than the Benvenue's foursquare, étude-like reading. But, honestly, neither account of Schumann's Quintet can hold a candle to Martha Argerich's enthralling 1994 concert recording (EMI, 1/96), particularly in the finale's magnificent fugal coda, where both period instrument groups sound relatively pedantic.

Much the same can be said for the two duo works. I rather like the ghostly *sotto voce* viola player Jodi Levitz employs in the

last of the *Märchenbilder*, but in general both she and cellist Tanya Tomkins convey a feeling that's far more effortful than fantastical. Eric Zivian's heavily accented fortepiano-playing doesn't help much, either, I'm afraid. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Shostakovich

Complete String Quartets

Brodsky Quartet

Chandos ® 6 CHAN10917 (6h 37' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam,

March 4-6, 2016



With this live set, captured last March in Amsterdam's Muziekgebouw

(not to be confused with the venerable Concertgebouw), the Brodsky becomes the first Western string quartet to have released more than one Shostakovich cycle on disc. Famous for pioneering crossover projects and with a propensity for performing from a standing position, the ensemble was unusual in championing the Russian-Soviet master well before his expedient ideological realignment, in some cases even before the general availability of printed material. Viola player Paul Cassidy, who provides a reflective essay for the booklet, remembers how the teenage musicians would tape performances off-air, writing out their own parts by listening to the recording over and over again. The Eleventh was one of the first pieces they played publicly in 1972. Growing up as the later quartets were being written and premiered, they were too young to enjoy a direct artistic relationship with the composer, so it meant a great deal to them that, on one memorable occasion in Bologna, they were able to perform the Ninth in the presence of his widow, Irina. Complete Shostakovich cycles have been a central feature of the quartet's schedule ever since, latterly presented in concentrated weekend bursts.

The sound of the group and its attitude to these scores has not remained static. Two Brodsky stalwarts have departed since the old Teldec recording. Something else has changed, too, in that the competition is much fiercer today. Set against the fabulously integrated sonority of the Borodin Quartet and the heartfelt homegrown advocacy of the Fitzwilliam, the Brodsky's original studio-made series felt distinctly 'contemporary'. That impression (only partly attributable to the drier sound of what was the first such sequence to be digitally encoded throughout) was also the

product of a certain detachment and self-consciousness of approach. Nuances were applied sparingly and knowingly, as if from outside the music, to define a mood. The sharp rhythmic clarity commanded respect rather than love. Today we've had the turbocharged perfectionism of the Emerson Quartet, the Gallic wit and finesse of the Quatuor Danel, the contextual programming of the Pacifica Quartet – 'adding variety and perspective to the listening experience' – and so many more.

Decades of concert-giving have encouraged a freer, more robust Brodsky style that admits extra grit and pressurises the busy, quasi-symphonic rhetoric of Shostakovich's more conventional scores. The Fifth is too edgy and shrieky for me, the Ninth's finale again frenzied and nervous, to an extent that might have been rejected in a studio take. The newly spacious Eighth brings other doubts: it feels studied, the detail intrusive. That Daniel Rowland, a fan of the quartet before he actually joined, is an intensely committed leader is confirmed early on by his soloistic contributions to the Second Quartet. The acoustic setting would seem ideal yet his vibrato can acquire a febrile quality at high decibels and the whole ensemble at times takes on a rather lean, brittle quality, lacking the mellifluous blend associated with the Borodin line-ups of yesteryear. There are of course many ways to project the music's balance of intimacy and power. Witness the more direct, less perfect playing of the Beethoven Quartet, for whom the scores were actually written.

In Shostakovich's most cryptic, pared-down late utterances the argument is given unprecedented room to breathe. But then the present players have always made a point of taking the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Quartets slower than anyone else, the latter's six *adagios* wearier than they seem in rival accounts. Sceptics as well as aficionados will find this doleful, emphatic rendition a remarkable take on what can only be construed as a meditation on death. There is, however, a school of thought that favours a more wistful, less zombie-like manner. The First Quartet, again quite measured, is made to seem less than usually peripheral to the weightier discourse to come. This is not to say that the musicians make heavy weather of it. As always, authenticity is in the ear of the listener.

For those still wedded to physical format, Chandos's presentation has a certain logic on its side. The 15 quartets are offered in chronological order, shorn of makeweights. The decision has been

made to eliminate applause without editing the life out of the music-making.

David Gutman

Selected comparisons:

Borodin Qt (3/86⁸) (MELO) MELCD100 1077

Brodsky Qt (6/92) (TELD) 2564 60867-2

Fitzwilliam Qt (6/92⁸) (LOND) 455 776-2LC6

Emerson Qt (6/00⁸) (DG) 475 7407DC5

Danel Qt (5/06⁸) (ALPH) ALPHA226

Beethoven Qt (DORE) DHR7911-5

Pacific Qt (CED) BOX1003

Stanford · Joachim

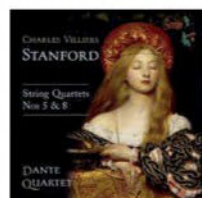
Joachim Romance, Op 2 No 1^a

**Stanford String Quartets - No 5, Op 104;
No 8, Op 167**

Dante Quartet; ^aKrycia Osostowicz *vn*

^aMark Bebbington *pf*

Somm Céleste (SOMMCD0160 (67' • DDD)



Stanford's Fifth String Quartet walks out with a spring in its step and a song on its lips: not,

perhaps, what you might expect from its subtitle, *In Memoriam Joseph Joachim*. In fact, as Jeremy Dibble explains in the booklet-notes, this isn't a work of mourning so much as a celebration of a 50-year friendship: Joachim, said Stanford, 'was not the sort of man whose memory could be associated with sadness'. He quotes Joachim's Romance, Op 2 No 1, as a sort of motto-theme; it crops up at about 8'10" in the first movement and again at 5'06" in the second. Appropriately, Somm has included Joachim's original on the disc for comparison.

In fact, this whole disc serves Stanford handsomely. These are premiere recordings, but the Dante Quartet speak Stanford's lyrical, lucid but slightly reticent late-Romantic language like natives. Other groups may have a more streamlined sound but there's a genuine sense here of four individuals in conversation; a spontaneity, too, that evokes a live occasion.

The third movement of the Eighth Quartet is a good place to take the measure of these performances, with the individual players taking turns to declaim the melody against a surging accompaniment. This is Stanford at his most ardent (his Irish roots show through in the finale); elsewhere the Dantes do a wonderfully natural and unaffected job of letting the poetry seep out from beneath Stanford's civilised exterior. In its understated way, this music gets under your skin. Clear, warm sound completes a really worthwhile release.

Richard Bratby

Tchaikovsky

String Quartets - No 1, Op 11; No 3, Op 30

Heath Quartet

Harmonia Mundi (HMU90 7665 (66' • DDD)



Although only five years separate Tchaikovsky's first and last string

quartets, they are stylistically very different. The First, written in 1871, epitomises the composer's remarkable gift for melody, not least in the famous *Andante cantabile*, while the Third is one of Tchaikovsky's works which bears an intensely personal emotional burden. The pair feature on the Heath Quartet's Harmonia Mundi debut in clean, assured performances.

'Why always the *Andante*? They do not seem to want to know anything else!', complained Tchaikovsky to his brother, Modest. The second movement of the String Quartet No 1 spawned myriad arrangements and is easily the most popular movement from his string quartet output. Based on an old folksong Tchaikovsky heard in Kamenka, the composer reported that it brought Leo Tolstoy to tears. The Heath Quartet's account is rather dry-eyed, however, stressing the lyrical over the melancholy compared with the Borodin Quartet's more sentimental reading for Teldec. The Heath's sound is bright and without undue vibrato, which gives their playing a slightly cool edge for this repertoire. The Scherzo is light on its feet and credit is due for taking the exposition repeat in the finale (unlike the Borodin or Utrecht quartets).

The Third Quartet was composed in 1876 in memory of Ferdinand Laub, who had played first violin in the premieres of Tchaikovsky's first two quartets. 'Nobody draws strains out of the violin that touch the soul so deeply, are so strong and powerful and also so tender and caressing', wrote the composer. The Heath Quartet's careful attention to dynamics pays dividends in the introspective first movement, which is almost symphonic in style, plunging us into a very different world to the First Quartet. The second movement bustles in a lively fashion, without labouring the humour.

Tchaikovsky seems to draw on Russian Orthodox chant in the third-movement *Andante funebre e doloroso*. The Heath Quartet don't hang around here, with rather a purposeful tread for a funeral march. There's deeper pain to be mined here, especially in the Utrecht Quartet's

excellent reading, but the finale brings the quartet to an exuberant close.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison - coupled as above:

Borodin Qt (1/94⁸) (ELAT) 2564 61774-2

String Quartet No 1 - selected comparison:

Utrecht Qt (2/10) (MDG) MDG903 1575-6

String Quartet No 3 - selected comparison:

Utrecht Qt (MDG) MDG903 1798-6

'Music for a Prussian Salon'

'Franz Tausch in Context'

Baermann Quintet, Op 23 - Adagio (arr Robert Percival) Crusell Concert-Trio J Stamitz Three Quartets Tausch XIII Pièces en quatuor, Op 22

Boxwood & Brass

Resonus (RES10177 (73' • DDD)



Unless you're a clarinet geek, the name Franz Tausch might not mean too

much. He was an important clarinetist during the developing years of the instrument, growing up in the Mannheim court, where it is possible that he and his father were the players heard by Mozart on his 1777 visit, which piqued his interest in the clarinet. Boxwood & Brass perform Tausch's *XIII Pièces en quatuor* for two clarinets, horn and bassoon, plus works by Johann Stamitz, father of the Mannheim school, and Tausch's pupils Bernhard Henrik Crusell and Heinrich Baermann.

The period instruments blend well in Tausch's gentle Harmoniemusik, a sequence of perky dances, rondos and slower movements. It's not the most striking music and, perhaps wisely, the 13 movements are split into two suites which bookend the disc in button-bright performances caught in a sympathetic acoustic.

It is possible to hear Stamitz's three brief quartet movements for two clarinets and two horns as templates for Tausch's own compositions. Crusell's *Concert-Trio* for clarinet, horn and bassoon is the most substantial work here and contains virtuoso writing for each instrument, performed with spirit and vigour.

Even the most familiar music on this unusual disc may come as a surprise. For years, the poignant *Adagio* for clarinet and strings was misattributed to Wagner (unlikely as that may seem), but it was actually composed by Heinrich Baermann (1784-1847) and published in 1820. But here, the *Adagio* is given a neat twist, arranged by Robert Percival, Boxwood & Brass's bassoonist. It works beautifully.

Mark Pullinger

Simon Preston

Marc Rochester celebrates the British organist who made a significant contribution to the world of English cathedral music-making before becoming a global organ sensation

It is a warm September evening in 1966. A tubby 12-year-old boy sits in a capacity audience at London's Royal Albert Hall eagerly awaiting the start of a concert in aid of the Royal College of Organists centenary appeal. He has been learning the organ for two years and believes himself to be well on the path to Organ Greatness. He is keen to see his organ heroes (John Dykes Bower, John Birch, David Willcocks, Francis Jackson) as well as new stars such as Gillian Weir, Martin Neary and a golden-haired lad called Andrew Davis whose fame was to be made beyond the organ stool. But our tubby 12-year-old's greatest excitement is the prospect of witnessing the latest Organ Sensation, Simon Preston.

There is a shiver of anticipation as Preston makes his way to the RAH organ console. A quick bow to the crowd, and he has barely swung his long legs over the stool before launching into one of the most outrageous displays of pedal virtuosity in the entire repertoire, Bossi's *Etude symphonique*. For several breathless minutes the whole audience sits spellbound. Preston's legs bounce over the pedals as if made of rubber while his feet maintain pinpoint accuracy. As the music reaches its triumphant conclusion the packed Albert Hall audience lets out a roar the like of which London last heard two months previously when England had scored the winning goal at the World Cup final.

I was that tubby 12-year-old, and 50 years on I vividly recall the shock and awe of that moment. It was when realisation dawned that Organ Greatness involved more than I could ever hope to achieve. From that day to this, Simon Preston has been for me a hero.

Preston had first attracted attention in 1958 when – as organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge, in the early days of the remarkable

Willcocks era – he accompanied the iconic Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Indeed, what appears to be his first commercial recording is an LP (on the London label) of some of the carols from that 1958 King's service. He made his first solo recording (Franck and Messiaen) for Argo

a couple of years later, apparently recorded at just one week's notice.

At Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, Preston tirelessly sought to transform the choir, and

several key recordings from this time testify to his remarkable achievements there. He went on to do the same thing at Westminster Abbey, but his relationship with the English cathedral system was always stormy, and his single-minded pursuit of excellence along with his determination to look beyond the confines of the usual Anglican repertoire ruffled feathers. As Christopher Herrick, who was sub-organist at the time, recalls: 'Working with Simon Preston at Westminster Abbey for about four years was for me a splendid roller coaster. He was in a hurry to mould the abbey choir into the shape he required – repertoire expanded exponentially and standards

were demanded rather than coaxed. It was an exciting time to be accompanying a choir on the move upwards. Although he was well known for his volatile moods, he would graciously show due appreciation when he was genuinely satisfied.' In 1987 things reached a point which saw Preston leave Westminster, and the English cathedral system, for good.

English cathedral music's loss was the world's gain. He went on to stride the globe as an Organ Colossus, popping up in the most unlikely places, wowing audiences in the Americas, Australasia, Asia, Africa and the length and breadth of Europe with his inimitable charm, enthusiasm and steely musical intensity.

His legs bounced over the pedals as if made of rubber, while his feet maintained pinpoint accuracy

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1938 – *Born August 4*

Born in Bournemouth, he later became a boy chorister at King's College, Cambridge, returning as organ scholar in 1958 after studying with CH Trevor in London

• 1962 – *London debut*

Official London debut at the Royal Festival Hall in Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Bach Choir under David Willcocks

• 1965 – *First North American concert tour*

He has since returned many times, and in 1987 received an award from the American Guild of Organists, New York City chapter

• 1970 – *Becomes lecturer and cathedral organist at Oxford*

He held the post at Christ Church Cathedral until 1981

• 1981 – *A return to Westminster Abbey*

Appointed organist and master of the choristers, having previously been sub-organist there 1962–67

• 2000 – *Complete Bach issued*

Deutsche Grammophon released a 14-CD set of complete Bach organ music recorded over a period of 12 years

• 2009 – *From OBE to CBE*

Already an OBE (New Year's Honours, 2000), he was promoted to CBE in the Birthday Honours



To an amazing calendar of live performances he added an astonishing discography that amounts to well over 100 recordings, making him possibly the most recorded organist of all time.

Those recordings go way beyond the usual repertoire of solo organists. There are the classic concerto recordings, the matchless discs he made as conductor, and a surprising number on which his name appears in the credits as composer. His versatility is most famously demonstrated in the soundtrack to the 1984 movie *Amadeus*, where he features as performer, conductor and composer.

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



It seems appropriate to leave the last word on an icon for organists, organ lovers and record collectors the world over to another of today's most respected organists, Wayne Marshall: 'I have long admired Simon Preston's amazing musicianship and talent. I will always remember an epic choral evensong broadcast that took place while he was organist at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, as well as his phenomenal recordings of the Poulenc motets and his recording of Messiaen's *L'Ascension* while he was still organ scholar at King's! A truly great man.' **G**

Messiaen
La Nativité
du Seigneur
Simon Preston *org*
Decca (3/66)

Instrumental



Hugo Shirley greets Lars Vogt's Schubert recital:

'There's no doubting the high quality of the pianism, and Ondine's sound is beautifully resonant and realistic' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 86](#)



William Yeoman reviews a disc of 16th-century lute miniatures:

'Jakob Lindberg is utterly at home in the idioms of all three composers on this superb recording' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 87](#)

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Charles Owen *pf*

Avie ㉔ AV2366 (143' • DDD)



Technical polish, intelligent musicianship, well-reasoned tempi,

and scrupulously executed ornaments characterise Charles Owen's Bach Partitas, along with a rounded and focused sonority largely informed by finger power and hand balance, with little help from the sustain pedal. However, inspiration on the pianist's part comes in fits and starts. Next to Murray Perahia's subtle nuances and Angela Hewitt's dance-oriented aesthetic, Owen sounds comparably square and workaday in Partita No 1 (the Praeludium's predictable accents, the flat, unilting Menuets). But the C minor Partita (No 2) comes alive with the Rondeaux's wonderful rhythmic snap, while the Capriccio features deft linear interplay and a lightness of texture not easily achieved, particularly in Owen's effortless left-hand skips.

In No 4, the Overture's introduction benefits from Owen's lean animation, but his unyielding dotted rhythms prevent the music's grandeur and harmonic tension from registering (think of the classic William Kapell recording or Rosalyn Tureck, for example). Going from Owen's austere, minimally inflected Allemande directly into András Schiff's shapely Aria on ECM is like first encountering a Van Gogh painting in a black-and-white reproduction, and then beholding the intensity of the full-colour original. Conversely, the Courante presses ahead with the right hand to the fore, in contrast to the anchoring left hand and firmer basic pulse one hears from Richard Goode and David Fray.

No 3's opening Fantasia features nice dry-point interplay between the hands, yet misses the buoyancy and inner 'swing' distinguishing Schiff's Decca reading. On the other hand, some listeners may prefer

Owen's energised, almost militant take on the Corrente to Schiff's softer, more intimately scaled traversal, on Decca, while the Gigue is admirably Glenn Gould-ian in its articulation and wit. I was about to write off the performance of No 5 after its first four bland, undifferentiated movements when the Tempo di Minuetto kicked in and Owen's tone opened up. The nobility and specificity of the pianist's phrasing cogently justifies his slower than usual Gigue. I suspect that Owen has lived longest with the big Sixth Partita, judging from the fervency of the Toccata's rhetorical passages, the Corrente's underlined syncopations, the Gavotta's sense of line and the final Gigue's carefully scaled dynamics. In short, this release could have been better, given its illuminating moments, not to mention the cultivated artistry distinguishing Owen's previous Janáček, Poulenc and Fauré solo releases.

Jed Distler

Brahms

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 5.

Scherzo, Op 4. Variations on a

Theme by Robert Schumann, Op 9

Gabriele Carcano *pf*

Oehms ㉔ OC1850 (68' • DDD)



The centrepiece of Turin-born Gabriele Carcano's debut recording of early

Brahms is the mighty F minor Sonata, Op 5. He brings an admirable clarity to Brahms's thick textures in an objective reading that is more lyrical than heroic. A cool beauty pervades the slow movement and tensile elasticity characterises the Scherzo. Yet Carcano seems to hold the sonata at arm's length, rather than fully inhabiting it. Intellect trumps passion in this relatively low-key approach, which will satisfy listeners who prefer an Apollonian Brahms, while frustrating others for whom dramatic intensity and spontaneity are key.

The *Schumann* Variations receive more personal treatment, creating a sense of magic in some of the slow variations. Unfortunately, the Scherzo, Op 4, lacking the taut cohesion of the Sonata's Scherzo, is perhaps the programme's weakest link.

If Carcano's carefully considered interpretations have an overall drawback, it is that his tempi, which can incline toward the staid, do little to ameliorate Brahms's endemic slowness. This runs counter to recent tendencies, refreshingly exemplified by Plowright, Hough and McCawley, among other pianists, to keep things moving, and lends Carcano's Brahms something of an old-fashioned air. The recording captures his unfailingly lovely sound in full dimension. **Patrick Rucker**

Chopin

Piano Sonatas - No 1, Op 4;

No 2, Op 35; No 3, Op 58

Joseph Moog *pf*

Onyx ㉔ ONYX4152 (77' • DDD)



This new, well-filled disc from Joseph Moog, *Gramophone's* 2015 Young Artist of the Year, gives us a chance to assess him in two of the great masterpieces of the Romantic piano literature.

It's significant, however, that his account of Chopin's youthful First Sonata, which certainly makes no claims to masterpiece status, is the most satisfying. Here one can only listen agog to the patrician technique, the ability to dispatch octaves as easily as single notes and to keep even the busiest contrapuntal textures clear and unmuddled. Rhythms skip along, passagework sparkles – the result is a delight. The Second and Third Sonatas, however, ask for more, and Moog doesn't consistently deliver it.

In some respects he need fear no comparisons: few can have played the Scherzo or finale of the Third with such jaw-dropping precision and velocity, and the Second's *perpetuum mobile* finale is,



Joseph Moog brings jaw-dropping precision and velocity to Chopin's piano sonatas

predictably, a tour de force. The sound is excellent, too. But something's not quite right when the Second Sonata's first movement starts at times to sound like a technical exercise, with sheer speed apparently a priority; yet this is sometimes how it sounds to me, most noticeably as we shift into triplet crotchets at the end of the exposition (from 1'50"). There's an impressively intense concentration in the Funeral March, but also a lack of poetry in the central section, which is not in any rush (and quite slow by the clock, in fact) but strangely unloving; likewise the Scherzo's central section. Listen to Argerich or Pollini, to name but two, to hear what these apparently straightforward notes can become.

The same virtues and drawbacks persist in the Third Sonata, where Moog is big on clarity but again short on poetry and, in the first movement, patience – again, Pollini is just one who shows how you can have all three.

There's a lot to be impressed by, and the young pianist's fans will be interested to hear him in the repertoire. For me, though, this disc shows that Moog's Chopin has some way to go. **Hugo Shirley**

Piano Sonata No 2 – selected comparison:
Argerich (6/75^R) (DG) 419 055-2GGA

Piano Sonatas Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparison:
Pollini (8/86) (DG) 415 346-2GH

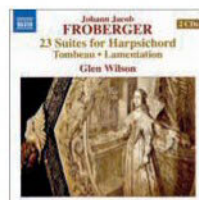
Froberger

23 Suites for Harpsichord.

Tombeau. Lamentation

Glen Wilson *hpd*

Naxos ® ② 8 573493/4 (127 • DDD)



One can sense Glen Wilson's frustration when in the booklet-note for this release

he directs us towards a more extensive essay on the Naxos website. He is referring specifically to an Allemande which represents a near-drowning incident, a narrative which only came to light in 1999 and for which the full explanation is presumably too long to include in Naxos's skinny insert; but the longer essay shows that there are many more thoughts Wilson was unable to fit in, or that have been included in such filleted form that they challenge the reader's understanding. Why 23 suites instead of the usual 'complete' 30? Well, because Wilson has rejected some as spurious and unworthy, and others because their final version is in another recently

found manuscript not yet available to scholars. Why no repeats? Because Wilson does not want to confuse Froberger's spirit with the ephemeral ornamentation repeats would demand. And why such surprisingly slow courantes and gigue? Because this is how Wilson, citing written evidence, believes them to have been played.

All very musicological – an 'audio version of a printed edition' as Wilson puts it. Yet Froberger was one of the most humane composers of the 17th century, and it would be a cold player indeed who did not respond to the searching expressiveness not only of his allemande-form meditations and lamentations, but of many other movements as well. Wilson does not fail them. A pupil of Leonhardt (himself a great Froberger player), he seeks a similar 'delicate balance of freedom and rigour', resulting in deeply considered interpretations, never hurried or frivolous, but with each note given proper placing and weight. The effect might seem at times to toy with ponderousness, but given full attention it can draw you into the rhetorical moment and hold you there in anticipation of the next. If the gigue are slow compared to a more free-spirited player's idea of them, Froberger's writing is certainly strong enough to take it, and different

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DEBUT PIANO RECITALS

Harriet Smith listens to first recordings by four players at the outset of their careers



'Heartfelt eloquence': Bamberg-born Christopher Park plays Schumann, Stravinsky and Neuwirth

How do you make your mark on the musical world with a solo piano disc? Do you show your sheer range across the centuries, include contemporary music, give it a definite theme or show your expertise in a particular part of the repertoire? And do you need a title? These can be dangerous: 'Mélancolie' may derive from the Poulenc piece that opens Japanese pianist **Miki Aoki**'s recital, but her exploration of Les Six plus Satie is anything but downbeat. Aoki made her London Festival Hall debut at just 12, though since then her career has been somewhat more modest. Certainly, she is very attuned to the music she plays – the aforementioned Poulenc *Mélancolie* is given with a delicate charm, and she manages to make the *Gymnopédies* her own without resorting to gimmickry, pacing them with complete naturalness. It's good, too, to have Poulenc's still undersung suite *Soirées de Nazelles*, highlights being 'La suite dans les idées', in which the dotted chordal writing has a suitably epic quality, which contrasts with the bittersweet harmonies of the next number. She's good at subversive Poulenc too, as witness 'Le contentement de soi'. The collaborative *Album des Six* is perhaps a little undercharacterised (the Auric is surely a spikier opening than we get here, the Tailleferre a little less fey), while Milhaud's delicious *Caramel mou* sounds positively polite compared to the

bumptious affair it becomes on Tharaud's delicious 'Le boeuf sur le toit' disc (Erato, 12/12).

Cyrril Ibrahim also has a title for his disc, 'Dialogue'. Whether he's referring to his relationship with the composers or with his listeners, I'm unsure. Rotterdam-born, he now lives in the UK. With a menu of Bach, Schubert, Debussy and Schumann he is certainly exploring different sound worlds. Of these, the Debussy comes off most convincingly, the first of the *Images* having the requisite balance of clarity and mystery, the Rameau homage suitable poise, even if 'Mouvement' doesn't flow quite as effortlessly as it might. With the other pieces come more reservations: the Bach C minor Partita is relatively anonymous, telling us little about how Ibrahim likes his Bach to go: the Sarabande is well paced (ie not too slow) but the closing Capriccio seems to run out of steam before the end. Both the Schumann B minor *Allegro* and the first movement of Schubert's A major Sonata, D664, suffer from unsubtle rubato, though in the sonata's slow movement he demonstrates a finely drawn poetic line. The Schumann, though, really needs more drive, more unHINGED capriciousness than it receives here.

Any artist who launches a disc with the Strauss-Grünfeld *Soirée de Vienne* is setting out their stall as a virtuoso. There's no lack

of assertiveness in the playing of Russian pianist **Gleb Ivanov** but I craved more charm, without which this simply becomes a bit of a bangfest. He certainly doesn't lack for technique but falls short in terms of characterisation and colour, so in the Schubert-Liszt songs, 'Am Meer' lacks a sense of near-nihilism, while 'Erk König' is short on mounting desperation. Like Ibrahim he includes Schubert's D664, though in his reading the first movement evolves much more naturally; the finale comes off best, though even here we could have more glee. For the Chopin Op 41 Mazurkas we get a change of acoustic, this one less sympathetic, which may account for the aggressive edge of the third of the set. He can certainly get around the Rachmaninov 'Humoresque' but the beautiful 'Mélodie' fails to soar as it can in some hands.

Bamberg-born **Christopher Park** is, frankly, in a different class and it says much for his maturity that he finds in the finale of Schumann's C major *Fantasie* a heartfelt eloquence without overindulging the rubato. Poetry is to the fore in its first movement too, which is eloquently voiced. I could, however, have done with more drive in the central March, the minefield of a coda in particular sounding somewhat tame here.

Park's *Petrushka* is less trenchantly headstrong (less overtly 'Russian') than in many readings but it really dances; lines tend to be lithe rather than jagged and all three movements are vividly rendered. Chords are weighted with great sensitivity too. Had I heard Olga Neuwirth's *Marsyas* 'blind', so to speak, I'd have guessed the composer to be Messiaen, which I mean as a compliment. It's a piece of great power and impact, qualities fully realised in Park's imaginative reading, which combines huge conviction and a wide colour palette. Definitely one to watch. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs 'Mélancolie'
Miki Aoki
Profil © PH15023



Various Cpsrs 'Dialogue'
Cyrril Ibrahim
Stone Records © ST8063



Various Cpsrs Piano Works
Gleb Ivanov
Delos © DE3520



Neuwirth. Schumann. Stravinsky
Piano Works **Christopher Park**
Oehms © OC1863

beauties can emerge. And nobody could accuse Wilson's final track, the wondrous 'Lamentation for Ferdinand III', of lacking in free-flowing, wrenching emotion.

Lindsay Kemp

Gilardino

Au pays parfumé^a. *Capriccio etneo*.

Concertino di Hykkara^b. *Parthenicum*

Angelo Marchese *gtr*^a Adalgisa Badano *hpd*

^bWinds of the Sicilian Symphony Orchestra;

^bString Orchestra of the GliArchiEnsebmle /

Giuseppe Crapisi

Brilliant © 95266 (70' • DDD)



As the Italian guitarist, composer and musicologist Angelo Gilardino writes in his

booklet-note, 'I am not concerned about whether my compositions actually conjure up for the listener images of the places in Sicily to which the titles refer: what I care about is the fact that I wrote them with Sicilian myths and locations in mind'. Myths and location thus ultimately serve a heuristic function.

Gilardino may stand in that great line of guitarist-performers that includes Paganini, Tárrega, Brouwer and countless more. Yet he professes not to be the best interpreter of his own music, leaving that privilege to others. One such is Sicilian guitarist Angelo Marchese, who studied with Gilardino and who here presents an attractive mix of the latter's solo, chamber and orchestral works featuring classical guitar.

Gilardino's style shows a predilection for contrapuntal writing and exploring subtle contrasts in timbre, register and articulation. In *Au pays parfumé* – five inventions for guitar and harpsichord – he gracefully limns the similarities and differences between these two plucked instruments as an affectionate dialogue. The sonatina *Parthenicum* 'focuses on a

ludic element', while the *Capriccio etneo* delights in virtuosity; both are for solo guitar. And if the *Concertino di Hykkara* for guitar and chamber orchestra celebrates 'the guitar as a bird that flies surrounded by light', the effect is of an entire flock of birds predisposed to melancholy.

Performances are excellent throughout, with Marchese and his collaborators mining Gilardino's witty, lyrical and contemplative seams alike with gusto and sympathy. **William Yeoman**

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 16, D845; No 19, D958

Louis Schwizgebel *pf*

Aparté © AP133 (70' • DDD)



It seems strange that my first thought on hearing Louis Schwizgebel's

Schubert was that it feels insufficiently Beethovenian – or at least less so than we often hear. At the start of D958, cast of course in Beethoven's characteristically stormy C minor, he opts for a slight steadiness in terms of both tempo and dynamics, and retains a carefully regulated touch throughout. For the opening movement of the A minor Sonata, he is clipped and disciplined where many – Paul Lewis is a recent example – are a great deal stormier and stressier. (Lewis is also one among several to espouse a more Beethovenian approach in D958.)

But that's not to say that the pianist confines Schubert to the Biedermeier drawing room. His clarity, matched by Aparté's engineering, doesn't mean a lack of weight or force, his patience doesn't preclude excitement, and the pearly delicacy Schwizgebel gets from his instrument's higher register doesn't mean decorousness, not least because he peppers his light textures with mischievous, stinging

accents. Nor is he afraid to unleash the piano's full resources. It's just that, in readings that take special care with markings, he does so only when specified: there's always a distinction between *forte* and *fortissimo*; and listen, for example, to his minutely graded dynamics as the triplet counterpoint is introduced in D958's *Adagio* (from 4'45").

Some will no doubt miss the extra weightiness, and it's true that Schwizgebel's discipline sometimes risks curtailing the music's poetry and mysteriousness, particularly if you compare him to Pires or Lupu in the first and second movements of D845. But there is still much poetry to be found within his own parameters, and the final reprise of the theme of D958's *Adagio* (6'41") is exquisitely done. His light-footed way with the same sonata's galloping finale is terrific, too, especially the hand-crossing sections; and the gentle skip in the step he brings to both the preceding Menuetto and D845's Scherzo is delightful.

In sum, this makes for a refreshing and rewarding disc, and one well worth seeking out. **Hugo Shirley**

Schubert

Four Impromptus, D899. Six German

Dances, D820. Moments musicaux, D780

Lars Vogt *pf*

Online © ODE1285-2 (67' • DDD)



There's surprisingly little solo Schubert in Lars Vogt's discography, so this

Online disc is welcome. What it reveals, however, is a pianist whose considerable interpretative attributes now don't seem fully attuned to the composer's more straightforward – or apparently straightforward – utterances. Or at least that seems to be the case in the first three of the D899 Impromptus.

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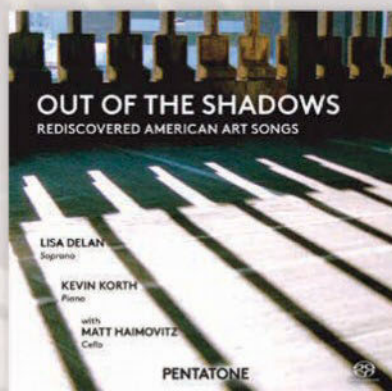
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Music Critic

There's no doubting the high quality of the pianism – and Ondine's sound is beautifully resonant and realistic. Much of the playing is forthright and determined. There is some quiet playing of lovely stillness, too, such as in the wistful *pianissimo* major-key passages in the First Impromptu (at 3'42", for example), even if most drops in volume tend also to herald drops in tempo.

Otherwise I find Vogt's penchant for stop-start pauses, within the context of some generally eccentric rubato, unsettling. He also makes some decisions with regard to voicing which I struggle to make sense of, with inner parts briefly highlighted before sinking back into the texture – at times we lose track of the top line in the G flat Third Impromptu completely. In a booklet interview the pianist offers a dark view on the biographical circumstances in which the works were composed, which might explain some of his decisions; on purely musical terms, though, much of it remains perplexing. Grigory Sokolov's recent version of these pieces, by way of comparison, is perhaps more overtly idiosyncratic but nevertheless seems to make more sense on its own terms.

Matters improve a great deal in the Fourth Impromptu, though, where Vogt's rippling, silvery touch is especially beguiling. He also seems a great deal more settled in the *Moments musicaux*, which receive a very fine performance. There's more wonderful *pianissimo* playing in No 2, a pleasing, jaunty jerkiness to No 3's rhythms and real excitement in No 5. Vogt is more convincing too, if rather po-faced, in his take on the *Deutsche Tänze*, where he is happy to let the notes do the talking in a way that he's reluctant to in the Impromptus. **Hugo Shirley**

Impromptus – selected comparison:

Sokolov (3/16) (DG) 479 5426GH2

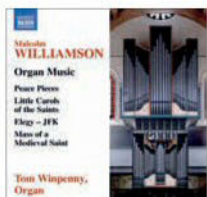
Williamson

Peace Pieces. *Résurgence du feu* (Pâques 1959). Epitaphs for Edith Sitwell. Little Carols of the Saints. Elegy – JFK. Fantasy on 'This is my Father's World'. Mass of a Medieval Saint

Tom Winpenny *org*

Naxos ® ② 8 571375/6 (99' • DDD)

Played on the organ of the Church of St John the Evangelist, Islington, London



With the exception of the *Organ Symphony* and the *Vision of Christ-Phoenix*,

organists have shown little enthusiasm for the music of Malcolm Williamson, so Tom

Winpenny has the field pretty much to himself. He included both those works on an earlier disc (released on Toccata Classics in 2014), and with this two-CD set for Naxos he ventures into the largely forgotten recesses of the solo organ output to ensure that almost everything Williamson wrote for the instrument is now available on disc.

This music is lucky to have such a conscientious advocate. Winpenny presents it all with clinical technical precision and close attention to textural detail, easily moving between moments of demanding virtuosity (the 'Sortie' from *Mass of a Medieval Saint*) and almost embarrassing naivety (the meandering *Fantasy on 'This is my Father's World'*), while flowing easily through Williamson's long swathes of utter harmonic charmlessness.

The first disc is devoted to the six *Peace Pieces* of 1970-71, where the hard edges of Williamson's acerbic, desiccated musical language are in no way softened by the brittle sound of the JW Walker organ of St John's Church, Islington, a hardy survivor of the English Organ Reform Movement of the 1960s. (The earlier Toccata disc was recorded on the warmer instrument at St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol.)

In his booklet-notes, Winpenny points to the strong influence Messiaen had on Williamson's organ-writing. This can certainly be detected in the *Résurgence du feu*, one of two works here which claim to be a premiere recording – although I am not sure that many of the others ever found their way on to commercially available CDs – but the music has a hard, bitter edge that seems too dispassionate to reflect the powerful imagery behind the music.

Much more convincing as an expression of human feeling is *Epitaphs for Edith Sitwell*, which has an intensity that overrides even the extraordinarily ugly pedal reed which jabs out from time to time. The imprint of Messiaen is most obvious in the *Elegy* – JFK, a work which simmers with grief and deep, almost personal, sadness. **Marc Rochester**

Ignacy Jan Paderewski

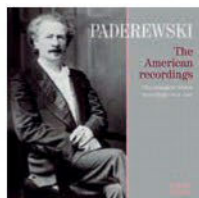


'The American Recordings –

The Complete Victor Recordings, 1914-31'

Ignacy Jan Paderewski *pf*

APR mono ⑤ ⑤ APR7505 (6h 37' • ADD)



Paderewski's fame as a pianist was on a par with that of Liszt and Anton Rubinstein, a fact that has made squaring his recorded

legacy with his reputation difficult. As Jim Samson has pointed out, Paderewski came late to the recording studio and was never entirely comfortable there, though he continued to record almost until his death at the age of 80. Deficiencies in his early training meant that he struggled with some areas of technique throughout his career. Yet musicians and critics who heard him in his prime, roughly from his 1888 Vienna debut through the first decade of the 20th century, found much to admire. In 1893 no less an authority than William Mason wrote that, in terms of touch, 'Paderewski is as near perfection as any pianist I ever heard and stands more nearly on a plane with Liszt than any other virtuoso since Tausig'. And long before popular interest in historical pianism gained traction, many Paderewski recordings were still available. As a small child, I remember being enthralled by his 78-rpm recording of Chopin's *Polonaise militaire*.

APR's new issue of the Victor recordings made between 1914 and 1931 compliments two previous sets of Paderewski's earliest recordings (5/08) and final recordings (2/10). In one of two informative booklet essays, producer Mark Obert-Thorn describes the challenges inherent in the project, not the least of which was sorting through a thicket of conflicting or erroneous discographic sources. Predictably the transfers are excellent.

Paderewski's Chopin interpretations are so well known that any detailed description is probably redundant, though several outstanding performances warrant mention. Very much to the manner born, four Mazurkas – Opp 17 No 4 (1923), 59 Nos 2 and 3 (1924), and 33 No 2 (1930) – are direct and charmingly poetic. The E flat minor Polonaise, Op 26 No 2 (1930), is a worthy companion to the grandeur of the aforementioned *Polonaise militaire* (1917), and several Nocturnes exude a *fin de siècle* perfume.

Probably the most justly admired of Paderewski's Liszt interpretations is the *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 10 (1922). The glissandos are ethereally light, and the flowing legato of the fioritura is wrought with a delicacy that unfortunately has all but disappeared from today's pianistic vocabulary. Similar finesse permeates the haunting 'La leggerezza' (1923) though, in this instance, wed to a dervish. A beautifully paced Spinning Chorus from *The Flying Dutchman* (1924; 1930) belongs on any shortlist of fine Wagner transcriptions. On the other hand, 'La campanella' (1926; 1927), or at least the version of it Paderewski plays, never seems far from collapse.

If Schumann's 'Vogel als Prophet' (1926) and 'Nachtstück', Op 23 No 4 (1928) are captivating, a plaintive 'Warum?' (1914) is positively disarming. Richly atmospheric accounts of 'Reflets dans l'eau' (1924) and four *Préludes* from Book 1 (1930) testify to Paderewski's perceptive grasp of Debussy.

Two Rachmaninov Preludes, in C sharp minor (Op 3 No 2) and G sharp minor (Op 32 No 12), are puzzling. Paderewski makes the odd interpretative choice of strumming the chords in the upper staves in the beginning of Op 3 No 2, inevitably trivialising the sombre texture, and crashes through both pieces as though in a rage. These recordings were made less than a year after the joint invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the USSR. Unlikely as it seems, could the 79-year-old Pole have been venting his patriotic spleen on the music of his younger colleague, even though Rachmaninov too was an émigré?

Of course there is much more of interest in these six and a half hours of recorded music. In addition, Paderewski speaks about the golden anniversary of his American debut in two bonus tracks.

In 1963 Harold Schonberg wrote that Paderewski 'would not be allowed to graduate from a reputable conservatory

today'. But since then our understanding of historical pianism has broadened. Even as critical esteem waned, Paderewski never lost his hold on the public. Perhaps a re-evaluation is in order, and this new APR set, with its wonderful transfers giving us an unprecedentedly vivid idea of Paderewski's vaunted 'golden touch', could well be a catalyst. **Patrick Rucker**

'Italian Lute Virtuosi of the Renaissance'

Fantasias, Ricercars and Pieces by
Marco Dall'Aquila, Alberto da Mantova and Francesco da Milano

Jakob Lindberg / lute

BIS (F) BIS2202 (81' • DDD/DSD)



This latest release by one of today's greatest lutenists features the music of, as Jakob Lindberg writes, 'arguably the greatest lutenists of the first half of the 16th century'. Marco, Francesco and Alberto share a common musical language. There are dances such as the saltarello and the pavan, and more freely composed fantasias and ricercars

and intabulations of madrigals and chansons. The textures are now homophonic, now polyphonic, according to the nature of the material. Each composer exploits as much of the compass of the six-course lute as possible.

But their musical dialects are distinctive. Marco, the eldest of the three by close to 20 years, was evidently a great innovator and one of the pioneers of the so-called 'broken style'. His Ricercar 30 and Saltarello *La Traditora* still retain some of their verdant freshness. Francesco, known to his contemporaries as Il Divino, reveals in his music a profound introspection despite the flashy displays of technique in works such as the brilliant opening Fantasia 34, *La Compagna*. Alberto strikes one as having been more extrovert, yet in masterpieces such as the Fantasia 20 demonstrates not only a mastery of vocal-style polyphony but great depth of feeling.

Lindberg is utterly at home in the idioms of all three. He brings a plangent sweetness to Francesco's arrangement of Arcadelt's *Quanta beltà*. The variations of Alberto's Pavan *La Romanesca* have a fragrant, insouciant quality, and even Marco's seemingly modest Ricercar 33 proves to be one of the highlights of this superb recording. **William Yeoman**



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John Rutter

If there's one composer associated with Christmas it's John Rutter. Alexandra Coghlan celebrates his appealing music

John Rutter came early and instinctively to composing, picking out tunes on the 'old, out-of-tune, upright piano' in his parents' flat above a Baker Street pub from the age of just four. 'I always preferred making up my own little improvisations,' he explains, 'rather than playing what other people had written, which I rather struggled with. I wasn't a terrifically good sight-reader, and somehow just being set free in a magic garden of my own imagining was more congenial to me than performing.'

It's a garden that has since flourished, and at 71 Rutter sits alongside Arvo Pärt, John Adams and James MacMillan as one of the world's most-performed living classical composers. But this success has come at a cost. The melodic, approachable character of Rutter's music might have won him fans, but has alienated the classical establishment, whose suspicions and reservations about his music – variously described in reviews as 'saccharine', 'derivative' and 'facile' – have persisted for half a century. But Rutter – who, incidentally, is no stranger to the tougher edge of contemporary music, having produced albums of music by Giles Swayne and most recently Nico Muhly – has made his peace with such criticism, secure in his own musical idiom.

'The familiarity of his melodies, drawing on many disparate worlds gives them a sense of ease'

'I'm no pop musician and my training is entirely classical,' he says, 'but I'm probably more a songwriter than a composer. My music inhabits a funny kind of world somewhere between that of contemporary concert music and songwriting. I tell myself that if you've never been in fashion you can never go out of fashion. And I've certainly never been in fashion!'

Not even Rutter's harshest critic would deny the composer's gift for writing a good tune. Others may create melodies, spin them from nothing in a curious artistic alchemy, but Rutter's skill is different. His finest melodies – whether the delicate, folk-infused 'There Is A Flower', the almost improvisatory 'Pie Jesu' from the Requiem, or the irrepressible 'Shepherd's Pipe Carol' – give the impression that they have always existed, always been playing somewhere just out of earshot. Like a sculptor carving a form, releasing it from within a block of stone, so Rutter seems to carve out his music.

The inevitability, the familiarity of these melodies, drawing on worlds as disparate as folk music, musical theatre and Anglican hymns – gives them a sense of ease, but they are nothing if not hard won. 'If the piece I'm writing is melodic then I spend ages writing the tune – it has to be natural, to sound as if no one has written it. That's a lot harder than it appears. It takes a lot of art to create absolute simplicity and



The apparent ease of Rutter's melodies is hard-won indeed

artlessness.' Take 'What Sweeter Music', for example. Phrases of text and music dovetail imperceptibly with one another, dissolving divisions in music that seems to unfold in a single melodic breath. Or the short anthem 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You', in which each phrase grows organically from the last – the simple, seven-note opening gambit gaining confidence and complexity as it develops, rising in range and hitting its climax instinctively at the word 'shine'.

But the quality of Rutter's craftsmanship is no less evident when applied to other people's melodies. Whether it's in his arrangements of traditional carols (his Handelian 'Joy to the World' or his expansive, anthemic *Wexford Carol*), his harmonisation and reworking of plainsong, his deft handling of folk melodies (in the *Suite for Strings*, *Five Traditional Songs* and *The Spring of Thyme*), or even his witty collision of style and genres in his Beatles Piano Concerto, Rutter's instinct for texture and ear for orchestration are always clear, bringing a spark of invention and a point of view to even the most straightforward of arrangements.

Rutter is a disciplined composer, working regular hours each day at his designated composing cottage near Cambridge. The same discipline is evident in his music, which for all its emotional directness is built on solid structural foundations. 'It's like architecture,' he explains. 'You may just see all the glass and chrome, but it's the steel joists inside that keep the whole thing standing.' Such musical scaffolding can be seen in the 'arch-like structure' of the Requiem, constructed around the central *Sanctus* ('a sort of keystone movement – affirmative rather than contemplative') and fanning outwards through pairs of equal and opposite movements: the *Pie Jesu* and *Agnus Dei*, both prayers to Christ the Son, the two psalm-settings, and finally the two prayers to God the Father.



RUTTER FACTS

School Rutter attended Highgate School, where he was a contemporary of John Tavener. Both were chosen to sing on Decca's iconic 1963 recording of the *War Requiem*, conducted by Benjamin Britten.

Cambridge Rutter studied at Clare College, Cambridge, and later returned as Music Director from 1975 to '79. It was at Cambridge that he first met David Willcocks, with whom he would go on to co-edit four volumes of the *Carols For Choirs* series.

Going it alone On his 40th birthday Rutter decided not to accept any more formal commissions, feeling that they forced him to keep repeating himself musically. Since then, Rutter has preferred to compose to his own agenda, sometimes devising work with organisations or artists on a more flexible basis.

But if structure is a mechanical undertaking for Rutter, the actual process of composition is more organic. Rutter describes it as 'a sort of biology – like cells multiplying under a microscope. Everything starts with a small cell or a germ of an idea.' He takes Beethoven's belief that composition is 'the art of making much out of little' as his philosophy, and has an instinctive dislike of musical waste, of compositions that are 'prodigal with ideas' or that get too 'cluttered' with material.

Best known for his large body of carols, Rutter's Christmas music is just one facet of a career largely devoted to creating music for amateurs and young people – performers often ignored by other composers. 'It's an odd dichotomy, and one that simply didn't exist in the days of Vaughan Williams, Holst or Britten. I feel strongly that it's important to have a continuum between amateurs and professionals in every sphere of artistic activity, and choral music is one area where it already happens as, unlike orchestras, there are very few fully professional choirs.'

Rutter's three-movement *Gloria*, his Requiem and *Magnificat* are all staples of choral society programming, pieces that have proved again and again that their energy and appeal can survive almost any scenario or skill level. Is there a particular art, a technique to composing for these particular forces? 'I think the trick,' he says 'is to pare down your ideas but never to write down, even if what you are creating is quite technically restricted. Writing good music for children is, I contend, much harder than writing for the LSO or London Sinfonietta who can play anything you put in front of them.'

Rutter's range within this genre is impressive, spanning from the fizzing dramatic immediacy and playful musical pastiche of his *Three Musical Fables* – *The Reluctant Dragon*, *The Wind in the Willows* with its woozy summer-infused score,

and the unfairly neglected *Brother Heinrich's Christmas* – as well as his Gunpowder Plot-inspired children's opera *Bang!*, to his evocative and intricately constructed cantata *The Falcon* and the *Mass of the Children* with its declamatory, rhetorical vocal writing and knowing nods to Britten and England's musical heritage in the Tallis Canon that creeps into the *Agnus Dei*.

But anyone dismissing Rutter as simply a composer of community music would struggle to argue away the astonishing, Howellsian intensity of his 'Hymn to the Creator of Light'. Angular harmonic doubts struggle against brief flashes of consonant light in a striking musical chiaroscuro sustained over eight minutes. Rutter's recent large-scale *Visions*, which pairs a solo violinist and string orchestra with a boys' chorus to great effect, also explores a broader emotional and harmonic palette, musing with nostalgia that never becomes overworked or kitsch on spiritual loss and attainment.

It's this lack of kitsch that is so reliable a Rutter hallmark. Discussing Stanford, Rutter makes an important distinction between emotion and sentimentality. He describes the latter as 'unearned' or 'gratuitous' – music written 'in order to manipulate'. And this, surely, is the key to Rutter's own musical identity and his success. A Rutter piece may be sweet, even cloying at times, but it will never be insincere. Those tears that hover just behind the eyes when you hear the King's choristers singing Rutter's 'Dormi Jesu', they've been earned, every one. **G**

RUTTER ON RECORD

A trio of essential John Rutter recordings

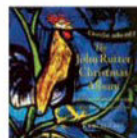


Gloria and Other Sacred Music

Polyphony / Stephen Layton

Hyperion (8/01)

Rutter's joyous, dance-filled *Gloria* is still his musical calling-card and you won't find better than this crisply explosive recording from Polyphony. Layton's meticulous care for text and phrasing really comes into its own in the smaller motets also featured here, whose simple beauty is never overworked.



The John Rutter Christmas Album

The Cambridge Singers / John Rutter

Collegium (12/02)

All Rutter's best carols are gathered together here in polished performances by Rutter's own Cambridge Singers, conducted by the composer. It would take a Scrooge not to be charmed by the dainty folk-beauty of 'There Is A Flower', delicate lullaby 'Dormi Jesu', or the precocious 'Shepherd's Pipe Carol' (composed when Rutter was just 18).



Visions. Requiem

Kerson Leong vtn The Cambridge Singers; Choristers of the Temple Church; Aurora Orchestra / John Rutter

Collegium

This fine new recording pairs Rutter's Requiem (recorded by a new generation of The Cambridge Singers) with the composer's unusual new work for solo violin, string orchestra and boys' choir. Menuhin Competition-winner Kerson Leong makes an eloquent soloist in a work that harks back to earlier English musical traditions without losing its own identity. This is Rutter at his most emotionally mature, painting on a large-scale musical canvas.

Vocal



Pwyll ap Sion is absorbed by Nico Muhly's collaboration with Teitur:

'Taken as a whole, Confessions is brilliantly witty, strangely compelling and, at times, subtly affecting' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 95



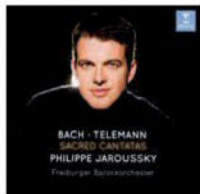
Alexandra Coghlan enjoys a varied programme of music for Epiphany:

'Clare College Choir create an Epiphany that's no pastel-coloured portrait of mother and child' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 98

JS Bach • Telemann

'Sacred Cantatas'

JS Bach Cantatas - No 82, Ich habe genug; No 170, Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust
Telemann Die stille Nacht (Der am Ölberg zagende Jesus), TWV1:364. Jesus liegt in letzten Zügen (Der sterbende Jesus), TWV1:983
Philippe Jaroussky *countertenor* Freiburg
Baroque Orchestra / Petra Müllejan *vn*
Erato © 9029 59253-3; © (CD + DVD) 2564 64915-9
(75' • DDD • T/t)



Two of Bach's most sublime solo cantatas sung by a singer of Philippe Jaroussky's

lyrical beauty and poise is without doubt a mouthwatering prospect. The star of so many Italian-language Baroque operas, oratorios and cantatas tells us this is his first album in German, and the supremely consolatory qualities of *Vergnügte Ruh*, *beliebte Seelenlust* and *Ich habe genug* certainly seem the right place for him to start. His manner is distinctive, not so much the honeyed, godlike flow of Andreas Scholl (whose Bach cantata recording featuring *Vergnügte Ruh* – Harmonia Mundi, 5/98 – is a treasurable creation) or David Daniels (who part-recorded *Ich habe genug* for Virgin Classics – 11/08), as the vulnerable and reactive human soul declaiming recitatives with urgent detail. Thus he softly but lingeringly bids farewell to the world in *Ich habe genug*'s famous central aria 'Schlummert ein', tiptoes his way nervously through the tortuously groping middle aria of *Vergnügte Ruh* like some put-upon castrato operatic hero, or joyfully opens up his voice in the cathartic final arias of both cantatas. In short, he is both less comfortable to listen to than Scholl and Daniels and more compelling.

Equally refreshing is Jaroussky's choice not to couple these two great works with Bach's other alto cantatas (Nos 35 and 54) but with two cantatas by Telemann. That they were originally written for bass suggests that Jaroussky really does admire

them for their musical qualities, and indeed they are works to surprise anyone eager to associate Telemann with superficiality. Both dealing with Passion themes – the tense agony on the Mount of Olives and the death of Jesus – they achieve their expressive aims with a subtle sense of colour and sweetly melodious mood-creation that Jaroussky rightly characterises as 'intense purity'. Against Klaus Mertens's affectionate but somewhat pallid performances with Accademia Daniel (CPO) they are clear winners. It goes without saying that the playing of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra is absolutely first-class, but a special mention goes to the classy oboe of Ann-Kathrin Brüggemann.

Lindsay Kemp

Braunfels

'Orchestral Songs, Vol 2'

Drei chinesische Gesänge, Op 19. **Romantische Gesänge**, Op 58. **Die Gott minnende Seele**, Op 53. **Der Tod der Kleopatra**, Op 59. **Vier japanische Gesänge**, Op 62

Camilla Nylund, **Genia Kühmeier**, **Ricarda Merbeth** *sops* **Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra / Hansjörg Albrecht**
Oehms © OC1847 (67' • DDD)



The second instalment of Hansjörg Albrecht's Braunfels survey improves markedly on its predecessor (8/16). First, it consists entirely of original works for voice and orchestra, without the operatic offcuts or purely orchestral music that padded Volume 1. Second, it has marginally the better orchestra: this is not to dismiss the Weimar Staatskapelle's fine contribution to the first disc, but given Albrecht's sensuous way with Braunfels's textures, the slightly sharper focus of the Berlin Konzerthausorchester's playing is a distinct bonus.

We get a stronger impression of Braunfels as a song composer, too, and in particular a powerful sense of his use of the orchestral

song as a personal response to political crisis. With the exception of the *Drei chinesische Gesänge* of 1914, their eroticism soured by uneasy prophecies of impending conflict, all the works recorded here were written or completed during the Third Reich, when proscriptions against his music meant no guarantee of public performance. *Die Gott minnende Seele*, from 1935, is a harmonically complex affirmation of the Catholicism to which Braunfels converted in 1918. Begun during the First World War, *Romantische Gesänge* was only completed during the Second. The dark, uncompromising *Vier japanische Gesänge* of 1945 were a response to the death of Braunfels's younger son on the Eastern front. Even the cantata *Der Tod der Kleopatra* (1944), which inevitably invites comparison with Berlioz, is a war work with its depiction of suicide in the aftermath of defeat.

The material is shared between three very different sopranos. Ricarda Merbeth is more at home with the declamation of the *Japanische Gesänge* than as Cleopatra, whose high-lying phrases expose pressure in her upper registers. Genia Kühmeier sounds very assured, though, in *Die Gott minnende Seele*, where the intervals are tricky and the vocal line disquietingly exposed. Best of all, however, is Camilla Nylund, sumptuous yet keenly responsive to the texts throughout, and displaying superb dynamic control in the *Chinesische Gesänge*. The latter, placed first on a disc that runs chronologically, is a deeply haunting work that should, by rights, be heard with greater frequency. **Tim Ashley**

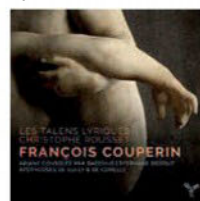
F Couperin

Ariane consolée par Bacchus[®]. **L'apothéose de Lulli**. **Le Parnasse, ou L'apothéose de Corelli**

[®]**Stéphane Degout** *bar* **Les Talens Lyriques /**

Christophe Rousset *hpd*

Aparté © AP130 (60' • DDD • T/t)



Here, for the first time, we can hear what appears to be a lost cantata by François

Couperin. Numerous of his secular airs, chansons and canons survive in manuscript and print, but until now none of the cantatas known to have existed at the time of his death (1733) have been found. Rousset's cogent argument for attributing this anonymous manuscript work, hitherto known only from a 1716 Amsterdam catalogue entry as 'Ariane abandonnée', is, I believe, compelling.

This *Ariane consolée par Bacchus*, somewhat unusually, is for a baritone. Although best known as an opera singer and recitalist of later repertoire, Stéphane Degout adjusts his voice to the varied pace within the recitatives and expresses words such as 'douceur' in the first Air and the tongue-twisting text of the ritournelle in the final Air with the lightest touch. Moreover, the acoustic of the Eglise Saint-Pierre (Paris) allows us to enjoy both the warmth of his voice and the detail of his fluent ornamentation. The presence of Christophe Coin playing the *concertante* bass viol part in these tracks adds further to the pleasure to be had from listening to this modern premiere.

The remaining works on the disc were recorded in the exceptional acoustic of the former 14th-century monastery Les Dominicains de Haute-Alsace. Couperin's entertaining pair of apotheoses accorded to Lully and Corelli is almost unique in the repertoire because of his 'acerbic' programmatic commentaries, elegantly delivered here by Rousset from the keyboard. These works have been recorded many times but rarely so well. Rousset's vision for his ensemble of oboes, flutes, violins and viol is sublime, as too are his harpsichord realisations. This is a landmark recording to treasure.

Julie Anne Sadie

Durufié

Requiem, Op 9 (1961 version)^a.

Messe Cum júbilo (1967 version)^b.

Quatre Motets sur des thèmes grégoriens

^aPatricia Bardon *mez* ^bAshley Riches *bass-bar*

The Choir of King's College, Cambridge;

^aOrchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / Stephen Cleobury with ^aTom Etheridge,

^bRichard Gowers *org*

King's College (P) KGS0016

(64' • DDD/DSD • T/U)

'Remembrance'

Durufié Requiem, Op 9 (1948 version)^a Elgar

They are at rest **Farrant** Call to Remembrance **Harris** Bring us, O Lord God **Monk** Abide with me (arr Ross) **Ramsey** How are the mighty fallen **Taverner** Song for Athene **Tomkins** When David heard **Traditional** Kontakion of the Dead (Kiev melody) **Weelkes** When David heard

^aJennifer Johnston *mez* ^aNeal Davies *bass* ^aGuy Johnston *vc* **Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross** with **Matthew Jorysz** *org*
Harmonia Mundi (P) HMU90 7654 (78' • DDD • T/U)



Whether through pragmatism, perfectionism or a combination of both, Maurice Durufié produced three different versions of his Requiem. The 1947 original was followed in 1948 by an arrangement for organ and choir, and finally in 1961 by one for soloists, choir, small orchestra and organ. The composer himself may have favoured his thicker original scoring but the recording industry has largely disagreed. Two new releases follow the trend, exploring the two latter versions with contrasting results.

The Choir of King's College, Cambridge and Stephen Cleobury opt for the 1961 edition, joining forces with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and soloist Patricia Bardon (the baritone solos are performed by unison basses). The effect is often hazily beautiful, chords suspended in the air of King's Chapel, but also less than clear. The additional instrumental textures pick out colours lost in the organ arrangement – strings melt into plainsong in the *Domine Jesu Christe*, trumpets blaze out the climax of the *Sanctus* – but also clutter the musical surface. With organ and orchestra placed so forward in the balance the trebles struggle to keep pace, and phrasing on the top line becomes a little choppy. Chorally this just isn't a patch on the vintage Philip Ledger King's recording (EMI, 1/82), with its meticulously shaped and blended phrases.

Next door at Clare College, Graham Ross and his choir make something rather special of the 1948 scoring, relocating to Lincoln Cathedral to use the mighty Father Willis organ. Choral unisons ring with warmth, sopranos maintain absolute evenness from top to bottom of their register, and chords decay to reveal a perfect pyramid of sound, firmly rooted on some excellent basses. Neal Davies is a luxurious casting for the cameo bass solo, while Jennifer Johnston's *Pie Jesu* is a model of emotive austerity, keeping vibrato to a minimum and letting Durufié's melody do the work.

While Cleobury pairs the Requiem with Durufié's curious all-baritone *Messe Cum júbilo* and the *Quatre Motets sur des thèmes grégoriens*, Ross opts for a broader

programme of Remembrance music from Tomkins, Harris, Elgar and Weelkes – a juxtaposition where the Renaissance works especially offer a welcome lucidity after the fragrant expansiveness of the Requiem.

Alexandra Coghlan

Elgar

The Dream of Gerontius, Op 38

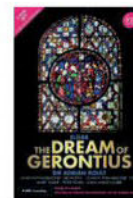
Dame Janet Baker *mez* Sir Peter Pears *ten*

John Shirley-Quirk *bass-bar* London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Sir Adrian Boult

ICA Classics (P) ② DVD ICAD5140

(100' • 60' • NTSC • 4.3 • Stereo • 0 • T)

Recorded for broadcast at Canterbury Cathedral, March 29, 1968. Disc 2 contains 'Adrian Cedric Boult', a documentary presented by Vernon Handley, first broadcast April 8, 1989



As television presentations go, this often treasurable account of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* is very much of its time – 1968. The location was Canterbury Cathedral and producer Brian Large was going to make the most of it. So prepare yourself for a surfeit of stained glass, queasy zooms, shaky focus-pulling and more gargoyles than Elgar's host of gibbering demons could ever shake a stick at. It isn't subtle (on the contrary), it isn't discreet, but it gives you a sense of place and it takes great pains to move as far away as is possible from the standard BBC point-and-shoot approach to music broadcasts.

I take some exception to the opening page or two of the Prelude sounding from under screen captions but it took courage to resist showing any performers at all until almost the very end of the 10-minute Prelude, where the camera pulls back to reveal the patrician figure of Adrian Boult for the first time; and there is a positively daring cut to black-screen in the moments preceding the blinding light which marks the moment Gerontius comes face to face with his maker.

But most effective of all is Large's decision to have the soloists off-score and performing from memory not behind music stands but against the stonework of the transept; and – bearing in mind that date again, 1968 – we find three great artists at the absolute top of their game. Peter Pears, of course, went on to record the piece with his partner Benjamin Britten but his artistry and great affinity with the ethos of the work was never better demonstrated than it is here. For those who have an issue with the distinctive Pears sound (with all its inherent 'Englishness') I can only say that you need to put that aside and focus instead on the sheer

intensity and open-heartedness of the singing, the judicious weighting of words and innate sense of the music's beauty and line. Then there is the 'illuminated' quality of his head-voice, so exquisite in the prayerful hushed reprise of 'Sanctus fortis', and contrasting so dramatically with the thrillingly full-blooded release of 'In thine own agony'. He is, in a word, magnificent.

John Shirley-Quirk is marvellous, too, in both his roles, and Janet Baker, inhabiting the Angel as only she could, is in a league of her own. The radiance and amplitude of tone, the transcendent response to words, the key moments of ecstasy like the final 'Alleluia' (never better) – you can hear how her performance has marinated in the four years since her famous Barbirolli recording.

That Barbirolli/Hallé account has an immediacy and red-bloodedness that is in some ways the antithesis of Boult's magisterial approach. Boult is broader and grander in conception, and grows more so here as he takes account of the cathedral acoustic and demonstrably accommodates the echo-delay in his conducting. So much of that (not least in Elgar's use of the semi-chorus) is written into the piece but here we must deal with an acoustic reality and accept that the snarling incisiveness of the Demons' Chorus will be compromised, along too with the momentum of the great and protracted 'Praise to the Holiest' chorus. That said, the TV sound is remarkably good for its time and the quality of the solo performances, as I have already indicated, makes this a must-see.

The second disc offers a fascinating documentary profile (from 1989) of Boult, presented and narrated with compelling insight by his greatest admirer and advocate, the late Vernon Handley. I will never agree with Boult's physical impassiveness and insistence that body language beyond the movement of the stick was intrusive and always came between us and the music. It was in some ways (as here) better not to see Boult, as it was precisely this non-interventionist and controlled manner that gave rise to his reputation as a rather dull, stolid conductor. Not true, of course, but certainly with a modicum of foundation – as witness the difference between his *Gerontius* and Barbirolli's.

It is interesting, too, to hear Boult express serious reservations about the work itself. Not that you would guess from the commitment which so conspicuously underscores this fascinating document.

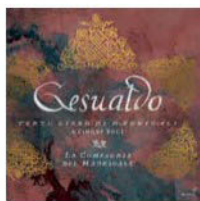
Edward Seckerson

Gesualdo

Terzo Libro di Madrigali

La Compagnia del Madrigale

Glossa Ⓢ GCD922806 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Ten years ago, when I reviewed the first three books of

Gesualdo's madrigals

in the recording from the Gesualdo Consort, Amsterdam (CPO, 2/06), I observed that these had not been as well served on disc as the last three. As regards Book 3, at least, that is no longer the case. Since then, Delitiae Musicae have recorded it as part of a complete cycle (Naxos, A/11), and now La Compagnia del Madrigale have joined the frame.

Their line-up is essentially the same as that of La Venexiana but without former director Claudio Cavina, and it seems likely that they will complete the cycle begun in their previous incarnation. Thus we have three very contrasted readings: the Gesualdo Consort brighter, Delitiae Musicae's all-male line-up lower and more veiled, and La Compagnia somewhere in between (unlike the other two ensembles, they dispense with countertenors and are *a cappella* throughout).

La Compagnia don't follow the published order (there's no reason why they should), beginning instead with 'Ancidetemi pur', one of Book 3's highlights. With its striking initial gesture this is a riveting opener, and these singers are especially good at such key moments, where the composer takes the lead, as it were; when textures become denser and more contrapuntal, one wonders whether Cavina's guiding hand might have imparted a shade more purpose. That said, La Compagnia bring out a greater degree of lyricism than their rivals, and many will prefer these readings for that reason alone.

My personal preference would go towards Harry van der Kamp's Dutch ensemble on account of their clearer textures in the mid-range and formal cogency, and a slightly uncomfortable over-exposed sonority (in the photographic sense) that fits Gesualdo's temper very well. Nonetheless, it's good to have this work, a turning point in the composer's output, from an ensemble whose sound has made so much of the running in the recent discography. **Fabrice Fitch**

Gilse

Eine Lebensmesse

Heidi Melton *sop* Gerhild Romberger *contr*

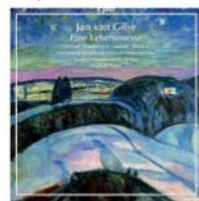
Roman Sadnik *ten* Vladimir Baykov *bass* National

Women's Youth Choir; Netherlands Radio Choir and Philharmonic Orchestra / Markus Stenz

CPO Ⓢ CPO777 924-2 (55' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Vredenburg Castle, Utrecht,

May 31, 2013



Completed in 1904, when Jan van Gilse was only 23, *Eine Lebensmesse* was the

work that put him on the map at its eventual premiere in 1911. In setting a poem by Richard Dehmel, published in 1897, he was adding his name to the growing number of musicians to be drawn to the German writer's work, deemed inflammatory in its day: born into a family of theologians, Gilse was being provocative in his choice of text.

Dehmel's poem, episodic and over-written, is a Nietzschean demand for individualism which argues that, in order to be fulfilled as adults, we must preserve the expressive spontaneity we possessed as children. Such narrative as there is focuses on the desire of an Übermensch-type Hero for a Maiden keen to lose her virginity, and an Orphan girl torn between contrasting active and contemplative lives, embodied in two figures described as 'experienced Eccentrics'. Choruses of Mothers, Fathers, the Elderly and Children map out the course of life from birth to death.

The score is handsomely late-Romantic, with gestures in the directions of Strauss and Mahler. The *Meistersinger* apprentices lurk behind a sequence in which the Fathers chatter about self-determination, and the influence of Brahms can be detected in the waltz in which the Mothers discuss the pains of childbirth and the education of children. The scene between the Orphan and the Eccentrics is the high point – an exquisite alto aria, followed by a wonderfully vital trio for alto, tenor and bass.

CPO's new recording comes from Netherlands Radio. Admirers of Markus Stenz's *Gurrelieder* (Hyperion, 8/15) will recognise the similar qualities of textural care and intensity he brings to the proceedings here – beautifully detailed playing and an energy that pulls you in, despite the work's narrative awkwardness. The choirs blaze away excitingly, though the soloists could be more consistent. The Orphan's aria lies high for Gerhild Romberger, and Roman Sadnik is more persuasive as the contemplative Eccentric than in the Hero's clarion utterances. Heidi Melton sounds sensual as the Maiden, and Vladimir Baykov makes a very seductive active Eccentric. Not a masterpiece, but fascinating. **Tim Ashley**



La Compagnia del Madrigale sing Gesualdo's Terzo Libro di Madrigale, a turning point in the composer's output

Juon

Ukrainian Folk Songs. Russian Folk Songs.
Jewish Folk Songs. Die drei Schwestern, Op 99
No 2. Der einsame Pfeifer, Op 21 No 3.
Erinnerung, Op 13 No 2. Jugend, Op 13 No 3.
Klage der Gattin, Op 13 No 1. Das Mädchen, Op 2
No 2. Märchen, Op 21 No 2. Paradies, Op 99 No 1.
Regen, Op 21 No 1. Das verlassene Mädelein,
Op 2 No 1. Wiegenlied, Op 13 No 4
Maria Riccarda Wesseling *mez* **Clau Scherrer** *pf*
Coviello © COV91612 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Paul Juon (1872-1940) was born in Russia into a German-Swiss expat family and studied at the Moscow Conservatory, though from 1904 he was based in Berlin, eventually emigrating to Switzerland after the Nazi acquisition of power. He is primarily remembered as a composer of chamber music, and his Lieder and folk-song collections remained in limbo until they were rediscovered by the Swiss mezzo Maria Riccarda Wesseling during research at Lausanne University. Her Juon programme was originally intended as a birthday present to her mother, who comes from the same canton as the composer's family.

'Can you still play the old songs?' Juon asks in the opening 'Erinnerung', to which a descending Schumannesque piano phrase answers in the affirmative. A sense of rootless nostalgia pervades his music, and his songs to some extent form an at times conservative dialogue with tradition. There are echoes of Schubert in 'Das Mädchen' and of Wolf in 'Jugend', with its declamatory vocal line over a shepherd's pipe melody that hovers uneasily between major and minor. He was keen on folk music and one notices a fondness for strophic forms. There are moments of rebellion: 'Klage der Gattin' turns expressionist in its depiction of a wife confronted by her husband's adultery; 'Paradies' has a harmonically drifting accompaniment worthy of Scriabin. Wesseling includes three of his folk collections – Jewish, Ukrainian and Russian – that veer, paradoxically, towards art songs with their sparse, aphoristic piano-writing.

She and pianist Clau Scherrer are persuasive guides through Juon's world. Wesseling's voice is expressive if grainy, and she has a finely understated way with words. In the folk songs, one notices the ironic smile in her tone as a macho Cossack is dumped by his girlfriend in the Ukrainian set, and a refined sensuality as a

corresponding Russian pair meet furtively by a brook. The Lieder proper are all little dramas, with moods and characters carefully etched. Scherrer is a wonderful accompanist, subtle, clear and alert throughout. A disc of great sincerity, beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

Mozart

Mass in C minor, K427^a. Exsultate, jubilate, K165
(with two versions of opening aria)^b
^{ab}**Carolyn Sampson** *sop* ^a**Olivia Vermeulen** *mez*
^a**Makoto Sakurada** *ten* ^a**Christian Immler** *bar*
Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki
BIS © BIS2171 (71' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

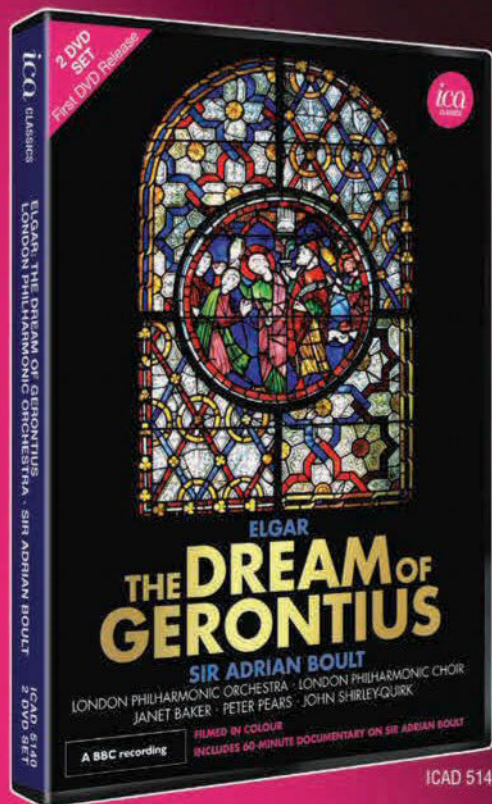


Period-instrument C minor Masses get better and better. The bar was set in the

mid-1980s by Gardiner and Hogwood, then raised in the new millennium by the likes of McCreesh, Krivine and Langrée. This new recording from Japan, which joins Suzuki's scholarly and startling Requiem, is fully worthy to join them. Reviewing the Requiem (1/15), I was disappointed that the acoustic and engineering blurred the inner voices, obliterating Mozart's (or Süssmayr's, Eybler's or Suzuki Jnr's) counterpoint.

SIR ADRIAN BOULT THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS

ON DVD FOR THE FIRST TIME



DOUBLE DVD SET

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- Stellar cast of soloists including Dame Janet Baker, John Shirley-Quirk and Peter Pears
- Also features a 60-minute documentary on Sir Adrian Boult for the 100th anniversary of the conductor's birth

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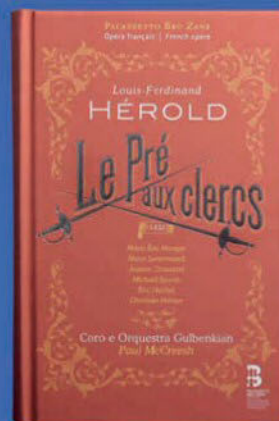
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SERIES OF CD-BOOKS
'FRENCH OPERA'

Le Pré aux clercs (1832)
Louis-Ferdinand Hérold



Coro e Orquestra Gulbenkian
Paul McCreesh conductor

with Marie-Ève Munger,
Marie Lenormand, Jeanne Crousaud,
Michael Spyres, Éric Huchet,
Christian Helmer

A swashbuckling love story
set against religious strife
in sixteenth-century France,
Le Pré aux clercs
had 1,600 performances
before 1949, and is an
integral part of the history
of the Opéra Comique.



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Here that problem is largely avoided in a similarly grand acoustic: that, and the fact that the C minor Mass is a far more vocally orientated piece than the Requiem.

The choir are well drilled and the two female soloists are matched as well as any on disc (see my Collection on the work, 6/13). Carolyn Sampson takes all the soprano solos (the 'Laudamus' is traditionally taken by the second soprano) and does so with the lithe coloratura, rich, silky tone and innate identification with this music familiar from her sacred Mozart collection with The King's Consort (Hyperion, 5/06), and intertwines memorably with Olivia Vermeulen in the duet and trio of the *Gloria*. Suzuki is no speed merchant (a full minute slower than Langrée in the *Kyrie*, for example), and maintains the through line in more strenuous movements such as the 'Qui tollis' and the 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' fugue that closes the *Gloria*. He takes his time especially in the 'Et incarnatus est', its beautiful pastoral scene spun out mesmerisingly by Sampson.

The edition used of this tantalisingly incomplete work is that by Franz Beyer, published in 1989. There is nothing here to discombobulate the general listener; however, those for whom such matters are important will wish to know that there are no (editorial) trumpets in the 'Credo' or horns in the 'Incarnatus', whose new string parts are perhaps more active than those in the more usual HC Robbins Landon completion. (Beyer also contrived an *Agnus Dei* from the music of the *Kyrie* but that is not recorded here.) As the only other recording of this edition is Harnoncourt's, whose peculiar balance between voices and instruments is a sticking point, it is worthwhile to hear Beyer's work on this disc.

Sampson is once again the soloist in the popular *Exsultate, jubilate*, the treat here being a parallel recording of the opening aria in the 'Salzburg' version, which boasts a different text and flutes instead of oboes. As a package, the disc as a whole is certainly a winner; the Mass easily ranks alongside the period-instrument benchmarks.

David Thresher

Mass in C minor – selected comparisons:

EBS, Gardiner (5/88) (PHIL) 420 210-2PH

AAM, Hogwood (7/90) (DECC) 425 528-20H

Chambre Philb, Krivine (1/06) (NAIV) V5032

Concert d'Astrée, Langrée (1/07) (VIRG/ERAT) 359309-2

See Musician & Score on page 64

Muhly/Teitur

Confessions

Teitur *VOC* Holland Baroque / Nico Muhly
Nonesuch © 7559 79443-0 (48' • DDD • T)



A song describing a cat stuck up a tree, another about the smell of a printer,

and (even more bizarrely) one that joyfully charts the journey of a sushi roll from a Japanese kitchen to the mouth of a hungry eater. *Confessions* – a collaboration between composer Nico Muhly and Faroese singer-songwriter Teitur Lassen that goes back almost 10 years – is hardly what one might call conventional. Add to this unlikely mix Teitur's lazy, grainy vocals, shifting phrases and a Baroque accompaniment comprising recorder, lute, harpsichord and strings, and this 50-minute song-cycle's sheer weirdness may discourage some from venturing beyond the first few tracks.

Taken as a whole, however, *Confessions* is brilliantly witty, strangely compelling and, at times, subtly affecting. In fact, the cycle's subject matter is rooted in a different kind of conventionality – the mundane act of internet browsing and video posting. Teitur and Muhly sourced material for their songs by trawling through YouTube clips, creating their own narrative story out of banal everyday acts.

It is in some respects well-trodden territory for Muhly, whose opera *Two Boys*, composed a few years later, explores the deceptive and duplicitous world of internet chatrooms. Everything from medieval manuscripts to messages posted on social media are grist to Muhly's ever-inquisitive associative imagination and the result can sometimes be diffuse and disconnected. Here it is sharp and focused. There's also plenty going on underneath the musical surface, too, such as a disquieting 79-beat rhythmic cycle that loops around eight times in 'Coffee Expert', executed with typical precision by Holland Baroque, who are excellent throughout.

Songs such as the flouncy 'Nowheresville' or mawkish 'Love hits you where it hurts' ostensibly reflect nothing more than their video clips' shallowness. On one level this fits in with Muhly's own predilection for glossy surfaces. But, as critic Dan Johnson observes, these glossy surfaces have tiny cracks in them, and 'sometimes the places where these cracks open up are the most important part of the piece'. *Confessions* furrows deep into these fissures, subtly reshaping, refocusing and deconstructing the original material in order to expose the true stories that lie beneath: confessions about loss and insecurity, hope and certainty. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Reger

'Orchestral Songs'

Brahms Auf dem Kirchhofe, Op 105 No 4^a. Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No 2^b. Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer, Op 105 No 2^c. In Waldeinsamkeit, Op 85 No 6^d. Sapphische Ode, Op 94 No 4^e. Wir wandelten, wir zwei, Op 96 No 2^b **Grieg** Eros, Op 70 No 1^b. Ich liebe dich, Op 5 No 3^b **Reger** Flieder, Op 35 No 4^a. Fromm, Op 62 No 11^c. Glückes genug, Op 37 No 3^a. Mein Traum, Op 31 No 5^a. Wiegenlied, Op 43 No 5^c **Schubert** An den Mond, D296^c. Erbkönig, D328^b. Gesänge des Harfners, D478 Nos 1-3^b. Prometheus, D674^a **Wolf** Der Freund, HWW118 No 1^a. Das Ständchen, HWW118 No 4^a. Italienisches Liederbuch, HWW159^a – Sterb' ich so hülle in Blumen meine Glieder; Und willst du deinen Liebsten sterben sehen (all arr Reger)

Stefanie Iranyi *mez*^b Rainer Trost *ten*^a Paul Armin Edelmann *bar* Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie

Rheinland-Pfalz / Gregor Bühl

Capriccio © C5275 (68' • DDD • T)



The title for this disc is something of a misnomer, since none of Reger's original

works for voice and orchestra are included, and what we have here is a selection of his orchestral versions of Lieder written for piano accompaniment, by other composers as well as his own. Reger began by orchestrating a group of Schubert's songs in 1913, before turning his attention to Brahms, Wolf, Grieg and, of course, himself. Many double the vocal line instrumentally and could, as he put it, with characteristically blunt humour, 'be rendered without any voice by resort town bands'.

Nevertheless, most were actually done with astonishing care. Reger allows himself grand Romantic gestures only in Grieg. Elsewhere, restraint seemingly rules. Strings largely predominate, with splashes of woodwind and brass colour. Most of his versions stand comparison with their originals, and it's fascinating to note what is added and sometimes taken away. Schubert's 'Prometheus' loses its edge without the piano's percussive quality but two songs from Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch* sound very dark, Wagnerian and sexy as clarinets in thirds wind their way through the textures. The influence of 'Erbkönig' on the opening of *Die Walküre* has often been noted: Reger uses the latter's prelude as the starting point for a real roller-coaster ride of his own.

There's some superb singing here, too, though mezzo Stefanie Iranyi occasionally

sounds plummy. Schubert's 'An den Mond' lies a bit high for her, though Brahms's 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer' is creepily introverted, and she's charming in Reger's own 'Wiegenlied'. Tenor and baritone, Rainer Trost and Paul Armin Edelmann, are both outstanding. Trost, his voice wonderfully fresh, gets very passionate in the Grieg songs, is troublingly introverted as Schubert's Harfner, and takes us to hell and back with 'Erlkönig'. Edelmann, on occasion reminiscent of Hermann Prey, is sensual and caressing both in Wolf and in Reger's own songs, but brings terrific dramatic weight to bear on 'Prometheus' and Brahms's 'Auf dem Kirchhofe'. Gregor Bühl's conducting is admirably spacious and unhurried. Just occasionally he lingers: 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer' is slower than any version I know with piano, but he brings out the beauty of Reger's instrumentation to perfection. **Tim Ashley**

Schoenberg · Shostakovich

Schoenberg Kol Nidre^a **Shostakovich** Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti^b

Ildar Abdrazakov bass ^a**Alberto Mizrahi** narr

Chicago Symphony ^c**Chorus and Orchestra** / **Riccardo Muti**

CSO Resound © CSOR901 1602 (57' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at Orchestra Hall, Symphony Center, Chicago, ^aMarch, ^bJune 2012



Schoenberg's 1938 setting of the Jewish prayer of atonement certainly succeeds in its

aim to 'vitriolise out the cello sentimentality of the Bruchs, etc', as he put it. As a conception it forms an extremely interesting stage in his ideological journey (see, for example, Alexander Ringer's book *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew*; OUP: 1990). Unfortunately, as a piece of music it does not purge either the laboured style of his own return-to-tonality works or the cajoling earnestness of so much of his choral output. Compounded by the faintly embarrassing *Sprechstimme* declamation of the later *Ode to Napoleon* and *Survivor from Warsaw*, this perhaps helps explain why the piece has become one of his least often performed or recorded. Still, this performance at least projects the declaration of final faith with an authentic-sounding imperious quality.

Strange how much more contemporary Shostakovich sounds than Schoenberg in this curious juxtaposition. True, he too offers hostages to fortune in the *Michelangelo* Suite, not merely by selecting poems with such titles as 'Truth', 'Love',

'Wrath', 'Creativity', 'Death' and 'Immortality' but also by steadfastly turning his back on easy options to impress. Yet how much more his musical language makes of how much less; and how much more involving is his self-denying manner of expression. Made in 2012, this recording is Ildar Abdrazakov's second, and I hear a small but definite increase in authority and variety of colour over his 2005 Chandos account. On the other hand, the lyricism of 'Night' is slightly less secure, thanks not least to Nosedá's more flowing tempo, clearly helping him to sustain the line without discomfort.

Overall Muti's pacing is not radically different from Nosedá's – each is entirely convincing. But while each orchestra finds its own colours in the accompaniment, the Chicagoans do have the edge in terms of sustained tone quality and bite, where required. Again, each recording is classy in its own way, Chandos's maintaining more natural perspectives while the Chicago sound stage brings individual instruments and sections more to the fore. Chandos offers the Russian texts in Cyrillic, whereas the Chicago disc opts for transliterations but also helpfully includes the Italian originals. **David Fanning**

Shostakovich – selected comparison:

Abdrazakov, BBC PO, Nosedá

(4/06) (CHAN) CHAN10358

'As Dreams'

Janson Nocturne **Lachenmann** Consolation II (Wessobrunner Gebet) **Nørgård** Drømmesange (Dream Songs). **Singe die Gärten, mein Herz Saariaho** Nuits, adieux. **Überzeugung Xenakis** Nuits

The Norwegian Soloists' Choir;
Oslo Sinfonietta / Grete Pedersen
BIS © BIS2139 (61' • DDD • T/t)



I have an abiding memory of attending a Norwegian Soloists' Choir concert that journeyed through a tricky smorgasbord of Messiaen, Brahms and Xenakis, during which the singers tuned the start of each piece silently, using just their brains and the final chord of whatever piece went before. That programme, like this one, included Xenakis's *Nuit*. For more proof of just how technically astonishing this ensemble can be, go to 3'58" in that piece and hear voices emerge from a pitchless cackle into an upward glissando that alights elegantly upon a perfectly tuned minor second. Is there anything this choir can't do?

It would appear not. But while the more difficult pieces here (six out of the seven tracks) bring the most imposing singing from the choir, the song-like purity of Per Nørgård's *Drømmesange* shows just how attractive and unaffected the ensemble's 'plain' delivery can be too (for more of that, hear its staggering folk-song disc 'White Night' – 9/11).

So what have we, besides those works already mentioned? The galaxy of sounds that is Lachenmann's *Consolation II* (listen to what the singers are up to on the work's fringes), two pieces of good-vintage Saariaho (the quasi-medieval *Überzeugung* from 2001 and *Nuits, adieux* from 1991, the latter feeling somehow aligned to the earth's core) and Nørgård's *Singe die Gärten, mein Herz, die du nicht kennst* (a sample of the Third Symphony). And my personal highlight, Alfred Janson's *Nocturne*, a piece that asks big questions with Sibelian compactness of structure and that manages to make a root-position minor chord sound utterly terrifying.

There is delicacy, sensitivity, richness and detail in each performance here (no prizes for guessing the disc's theme) and excellent sound that gets to the many corners of each score. Add to that extraordinary imagination in the singing, individually and collectively. Such imagination is what defines this wonderful ensemble; the programming here tells you that before you've heard a note.

Andrew Mellor

'Dolce vita'

Anzi Voglio vivere così **Bixio** Parlami d'amore, Mariù **Cardillo** Core 'ngrato **Chiaromello** Fenesta ca lucive **Crescenzo** Rondine al nido **E Curtis** Non ti scordar di me. Ti voglio tanto bene. Torna a Surriento **Dalla** Caruso **Ferilli** Un amore così grande **Gastaldon** Musica proibita **Leoncavallo** Mattinata **Merritt** Il libro dell'amore **Modugno** Volare **Musumarra** Il canto **Rota** Parla più piano (Theme from The Godfather) **Sartori** Con te partirò **Valente** Passione **Jonas Kaufmann** ten **Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo, Palermo** / **Asher Fisch**
Sony Classical © 88875 18364-2;
(M) ② 88875 18363-1 (67' • DDD • T/t)



With this new disc, Jonas Kaufmann offers something like a transalpine equivalent

to his disc of the German repertoire popularised by Richard Tauber (Sony Classical, 12/14). Here it's Neapolitan songs made famous by Caruso and his successors, as well as additional later songs in the style.



Masaaki Suzuki with soprano Carolyn Sampson recording Mozart's C minor Mass (review on page 93)

Fans of the tenor will jump at the opportunity to hear him letting his hair down, and they won't be disappointed. But, for all the fawning booklet-note's claims for Kaufmann being an Italian manqué, his version of relaxed and easy-going is still pretty tense and Teutonic compared with, say, Juan Diego Flórez, audibly having a ball on his recent 'Italia' disc (Decca, 10/15). Kaufmann's new disc is glossier and more heavily produced, too, with the tenor placed far forward (with dabs of reverb) in the balance. The orchestrations, dutifully performed, are awash with fluty twiddles and swoony string counterpoints, occasionally bolstered by plangent mandolin and furrowed-brow brass.

Kaufmann does everything with the care and intelligence one expects, and no shortage of open-throated ardour. But neither the engineering nor the repertoire shows the tenor to best advantage, highlighting a lack of juice and honey in his voice and delicacy in his manner. There's too little lightness of touch in the skipping lines of 'Voglio vivere così', for example, and he can't quite vary his tone enough in the more repetitive songs – here you suddenly notice a few reprises too many of the big tune of 'Caruso'.

It's good harmless fun, even if it ultimately feels like a match made

less in heaven than in the boardroom.

Hugo Shirley

'Fire Music'

'Infernal Flames and Celestial Blaze'

Anonymous Ardente sole. Chi vuol seguir la guerra. Ciaccona di Paradiso e dell'Inferno. Mundi renovatio. Pour faire l'arkymie d'amours
Byrd Memento homo **Farnaby** Sometimes she would **Flecha** Ensalada. 'El fuego' **Glizzolo** Io mi vivea **Holborne** Infernum **Lassus** In un boschetto novo **Marenzio** Qual vive salamandra in fiamma ardente **Nola** Amor m'ha fatto deventar fenice **Ortiz** La folia **Praetorius** Ballet des feus. Bransle de la torche **R Rue** Au feu d'amours **Tromboncino** Non val acqua **Victoria** Veni Creator Spiritus **P Vinci** Sappi Signor **Capella de la Torre / Katharina Bäuml** *shawms*
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88985 36030-2 (71' • DDD • T/t)



You can tell within seconds that you're listening to a Capella de la Torre recording.

This award-winning early music ensemble has a wonderfully distinctive sound and spirit – wind-dominated, percussion-driven, absolutely authentic but always playful. They've also got a good eye for

a concept, and this second volume in their current elements-themed series is no exception.

Last year's 'Water Music' began the series with works by Praetorius, Josquin, Marenzio and Morley, and the new 'Fire Music' takes an even more eclectic approach. Music inspired by hell, Pentecost (with its tongues of flame), the sun and even volcanoes is drawn from across two centuries, ranging from anonymous late-Medieval dances to the sophisticated madrigals of Marenzio and sacred works by Byrd and Lassus.

Such a collision of musical styles and genres makes for an exhilarating recital, propelled forwards on the resonant beat of Peter Bauer and Mike Turnbull's drums and tambourines (at their best in Praetorius's *Bransle de la torche* and Mateo Flecha's lively *El fuego*) with soprano Cecile Kempenaers and her fellow singers providing strategically placed moments of reflection and contemplation like the exquisite anonymous *Mundi renovatio* and Lassus's *In un boschetto novo*. The vocal style here is deliberately folksy and direct. In many ways this is the anti-Oxbridge early music disc – authentic rather than too self-consciously artful, delighting in the rougher edges and wilder textures of the period. This is music with dirt under its

fingernails, and all the better for it. Katharina Bäuml has put together another idiosyncratic and thrilling disc here, and I can't be the only one looking forward to the musical earthquakes or tempests of the next volume. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Mater ora filium'

'Music for Epiphany'

Bax Mater ora filium **L Berkeley** I sing of a maiden **Bingham** Epiphany^a **Byrd** Ecce advent dominator Dominus **Clemens non Papa** Magi veniunt ab oriente **Cornelius** The Three Kings (arr Ivor Atkins) **Howells** Here is the little door. Long, long ago **Lassus** Omnes de Saba **Mouton** Nesciens mater **Niles** I wonder as I wander (arr John Rutter) **Palestrina** Tribus miraculis ornatum **Poulenc** Videntes stellam **Sheppard** Reges Tharsis **Traditional** As with gladness men of old^a. Hail to the Lord's Anointed^a. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness^a (all arr Ross) **Warlock** Benedicamus Domino. Bethlehem Down (arr David Hill)^a **Weir** Illuminare, Jerusalem^a **Choir of Clare College, Cambridge / Graham Ross** with ^a**Michael Papadopoulos** *org* Harmonia Mundi © HMU90 7653 (73) • DDD • T/t



Taking inspiration from the seasons of the Anglican year – Advent, Passiontide, Pentecost,

Easter – Graham Ross and the mixed-voice Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, have put together a thoughtful series of recordings that keep one foot in traditional Oxbridge Renaissance repertoire while also moving that tradition determinedly forwards into the 21st century. Their latest disc – 'Music for Epiphany' – is no exception, offering a collision of new and old that coalesces into a seasonal collection that works just as well as a recital as it does a reference recording.

Epiphany is a tricky season musically, its best anthems often assimilated into Christmas services, leaving little to keep congregations going through January. Here Ross reclaims many of these 'carols', including Warlock's contrasting *Bethlehem Down* and *Benedicamus Domino*, Howells's *Long, long ago*, Judith Weir's *Illuminare, Jerusalem* and Poulenc's *Videntes stellam*. These come together with anthems by Byrd, Sheppard, Palestrina and Mouton to create an Epiphany that's no pastel-coloured portrait of mother and child but something at once starker and brighter.

The performances of the Renaissance repertoire are characteristically strong, though Sheppard's spacious *Reges Tharsis* lacks a certain ease and scope in its delivery, tending to the matter-of-fact; but it's in the 20th-century works that Ross and his

young singers come into their own. Fluid phrasing and expressive diction bring out the folk roots of the Howells and Warlock, while the exposed simplicity of *I wonder as I wander* and Berkeley's *I sing of a maiden* is deftly handled, especially by the impeccably blended top line. Bax's *Mater ora filium* makes a climactic closer, its episodic structure paced beautifully. Classic Epiphany hymns (most of them in sometimes unexpected arrangements by Ross himself) are a bonus, providing the supporting pillars for this wide-ranging collection. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Read our interview with Graham Ross on page 16

'Sonnets'

Aikin Shall I compare thee to a summer's day **Bowerman** When most I wink **Brahms** Ein Sonett, Op 14 No 4 **Britten** Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo. To lie flat on the back **Caplet** Doux fout le trait **Liszt** Tre Sonetti di Petrarca, S270 **Parry** Bright Star. Farewell, thou art too dear. No longer mourn for me **Sauguet** Je te vois en rêve **Schubert** Schatzgräbers Begehr, D761. Sonett I, D628. Sonett III, D630 **Vaughan Williams** The House of Life – Silent Noon

Ben Johnson *ten* **Graham Johnson** *pf* Champs Hill © CHRC103 (78) • DDD • T/t



Sonnets from Petrarch and Shakespeare to Auden afford a wide scope of musical

settings. Ben Johnson's selection, which had its beginnings in his programme for the 2013 Cardiff Singer of the World song prize, brings together ten 19th- and 20th-century composers and a range of languages and styles.

Its rewards lie in the juxtaposition of the familiar and the rare, and comparing the ways composers deal with the awkwardly long lines of the sonnet form. Schubert's two settings of Petrarch – 'Apollo, lebet noch', D628, and 'Nunmehr, da Himmel', D630 – are typically fluid, varying phrase lengths with complete naturalness. Johnson's enthusiasm for the sonnet settings of Parry is well borne out by the emotional journey the composer takes through Shakespeare's complex Sonnet 71, 'No longer mourn for me', with its undertow of self-loathing. A pair of settings of Shakespeare's 'When most I wink' by David Bowerman and Sauguet, the latter in French, are nicely differentiated from each other (and from Britten's darker vision in his *Nocturne*). Most effective of all is Vaughan Williams's much-loved 'Silent Noon', rapt and eloquent.

Through all of these Johnson and his namesake, accompanist Graham Johnson, are vivid guides. Johnson (the singer) is not quite an equally good voice throughout, possessing melting head tones but also a sometimes forceful edge. Both are in evidence in the pair of Italian-language song-cycles that form the backbone of the disc, Liszt's *Three Petrarch Sonnets* and Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*. Each of the Liszt songs starts out sounding stressed but resolves in a spirit of tenderness, and the most extreme vocal challenges (try the optional high B near the end of 'Benedetto sia 'l giorno') are skilfully handled. In the Britten cycle the young Pears sounds fresher, Rolfe Johnson more limpidly plangent, but this vital performance is alert to the potential of words and music alike. Nearly 80 minutes spent with some of the world's greatest poetry can hardly fail to be a pleasure. **Richard Fairman**

Britten Michelangelo Sonnets – selected comparisons:

Pears, Britten (3/56⁸) (EML/WARN) 015064-2 or (DECC) 478 2345DB6

Rolfe Johnson, G Johnson

(3/87⁸, 5/90⁸) (HYPE) CDH55067

'A Verlaine Songbook'

Bordes Colloque sentimental **Chausson**

Apaisement **Debussy** Ariettes oubliées. Fêtes galantes, Book 1 **Fauré** La bonne chanson, Op 61. Clair de lune, Op 46 No 2 **Hahn** L'heure exquise. Tous deux **Poldowski** Colombine. Cythère. En sourdine. L'heure exquise. Mandoline **Ravel** Sur l'herbe **Saint-Saëns** Le vent dans la plaine **Séverac** Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit. Paysages tristes **Szulc** Clair de lune, Op 83 No 1 **Carolyn Sampson** *sop* **Joseph Middleton** *pf* BIS © BIS2233 (80) • DDD/DSD • T/t



Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton have turned to Verlaine settings for their new

album for BIS, drawing inevitable comparisons with 'Green' (Erato, 4/15), Philippe Jaroussky and Jérôme Ducros's two-disc Verlaine survey. Wisely, perhaps, they take a very different approach. Where Jaroussky and Ducros focus on multiple settings of individual texts, Sampson and Middleton concentrate on song-cycles, bookending their recital with *Fêtes galantes* and *Ariettes oubliées*, and placing *La bonne chanson* at its centre. Notable among the remaining songs are those by Régine Wieniawski ('Poldowski' was the pseudonym she adopted), and d'Indy's pupil Déodat de Séverac, whose plainchant-inflected 'Paysages tristes', one of many discoveries here, forms the disc's unforgettable epilogue.



'Internal Flames and Celestial Blaze': the award-winning early music ensemble Capella de la Torre record an exhilarating album of 'Fire Music'

Sampson and Middleton are very much at home in this repertoire, frequently functioning as an indivisible unit with sound and sense beautifully fused. Occasionally – in the opening 'En sourdine' from *Fêtes galantes*, for instance – Sampson lets consonants slip in a quest for dynamic shading, though elsewhere texts are scrupulously delivered. She's in excellent voice, too, her tone clear and silvery, her upper registers exquisite: Chausson's 'Apaisement' sends shivers down your spine with its floated high *pianissimos* and suggestive portamentos.

The subtlety of Verlaine's poetry – in which inner emotion and external reality are in continuous if fragile accord – encouraged song composers to expand the range of their piano-writing, and Middleton's playing is marvellously fresh throughout, the thin dividing line between wit and melancholy superbly negotiated. When it comes to *La bonne chanson*, I prefer the more forthright approach of Gérard Souzay, say, or the underrated Camille Maurane, to Sampson and Middleton's reined-in interpretation, fascinating though it is. *Ariettes oubliées*, on the other hand, gets one its finest performances on disc, the slide from eroticism to bitterness immaculately judged. Very fine.

Tim Ashley

'Winter'

Alexander/Wilson Come wander with me
Arnalds/Arnarson For now I am winter
Bingham The darkness is no darkness **R Dale**
Winter Gjeilo In the bleak midwinter **Pärt** Nunc
 dimittis **Pott** Balulalow **Rachmaninov** Nunc
 dimittis **Sandström** Es ist ein Ros entsprungen
Traditional The snow it melts the soonest **Vasks**
 The Fruit of Silence. *Plainscapes*
Voces8 with **Mari Samuelsen** *vn* **Benjamin**
Roskams *va* **Håkon Samuelsen**, **Stephanie Oade**
vcs **Eleanor Turner** *hp* **Huw Watkins** *pf/celesta*
 Decca © 483 0968DH (65' • DDD)



Since its foundation in 2005 the British ensemble Voces8 has drawn glowing plaudits for the impeccable quality of its balance and tone, the versatility of its programming and its far-reaching educational workshops. In addition to a busy international touring schedule there is now a third 'themed' album for Decca, billed as 'a powerful aural portrait of winter...an immersive sonic landscape'. Naturally the composers hail predominantly from northern latitudes, including Estonia, Latvia, Iceland, Russia and England.

The centrepiece is a stunning performance of Pēteris Vasks's *Plainscapes*, three wordless linked movements, composed in 2002, and infused with a strong Pärtian flavour, with important roles for violin and cello, played here with tremendous verve by Norwegian siblings Mari and Håkon Samuelsen. This rendition is even more impressive than the Latvian Radio Choir's recording under Sigvards Kļava for Ondine in 2012, especially in the final section, when a cinematically vivid aviary bursts into life, complete with birdcalls, string harmonics and suchlike.

The rest of the programme is of predominantly slow and smooth music, though all of the greatest interest. Francis Pott's perfectly poised *Balulalow* bears many repeated hearings, as does Judith Bingham's *The darkness is no darkness*, with its hints of late Vaughan Williams. Voces8's composer-in-residence Ola Gjeilo offers a radically reharmonised revamp of Holst's *In the bleak midwinter*, and there are three delicious arrangements by Geoff Lawson, the finest of which is *Come wander with me*, first heard in the film *The Twilight Zone* in 1954.

Finest of all, though, is Rebecca Dale's specially commissioned title-track, *Winter*. With mulled wine and a slice of Stollen to hand, this warming masterpiece will definitely see me through any hivernal hardship. **Malcolm Riley**

Opera



Richard Wigmore listens to Alan Curtis's final recording:

'This is a worthy memorial to a Baroque pioneer who revived so many forgotten operas by Handel, Vivaldi et al' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**



Mike Ashman reviews an archive Walküre Act 1 from Tennstedt:

'Such close understanding helps Tennstedt recover the magic rather missing from his studio Wagner' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 106**

Bellini

I Capuleti e i Montecchi

Olga Kulchynska *sop*.....Giulietta
Joyce DiDonato *mez*.....Romeo
Benjamin Bernheim *ten*.....Tebaldo
Alexei Botnariuc *bass*.....Capellio
Roberto Lorenzi *bass-bar*.....Lorenzo
Georgij Puchalski *bass-bar*.....Companion
Zurich Opera Chorus; Philharmonia Zurich / Fabio Luisi

Stage director **Christof Loy**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Accentus ② DVD ACC20353; ③ ACC10353

(139' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live, June 2015

Bellini

Norma

Sondra Radvanovsky *sop*.....Norma
Ekaterina Gubanova *mez*.....Adalgisa
Gregory Kunde *ten*.....Pollione
Raymond Aceto *bass*.....Oroveso
Ana Puche *sop*.....Clotilde
Francisco Vas *ten*.....Flavio

Chorus and Symphony Orchestra of the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona / Renato Palumbo

Stage director **Kevin Newbury**

Video director **Jean-Pierre Loisil**

C Major Entertainment ② DVD 737208;

③ 737304 (176' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • S)

Recorded live, February 2015



The pacing of Bellini's dramas is a conundrum that should bother a director as much as the maestro. If a conductor needs to find the balance between long-breathed melodies and forward momentum, so a director has to trust in the composer's distinct expressive metre, the poise and stillness, as well as know when to disrupt it.

With men in ballgowns, silent extras roaming the stage and a revolving house of horrors, the surprise of Christof Loy's

production of *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* is how it respects the lachrymose beauty of the music while injecting the drama with an extra shot of pathos. Discussing the death-wish of the opera's two principals, Loy has compared this opera to *Tristan und Isolde*, and, together with set and costume designer Christian Schmidt, he creates a deeply pessimistic, dreamlike world.

Forget Shakespeare. Bellini telescopes the action on to the two lovers, their fruitless dreams and final hours. Loy turns the screw by suggesting their romance may be more about escape than passion. The Capulet mansion, where we stay throughout, is a dead end, wasted by private and public warfare – of the mafia-gangster variety rather than featuring breeches and sabres. Death becomes the only way out.

Unspoken memories bubble up from the surface in surreal touches, one of which is an androgynous man who glides around exuding menacing vibes – he gives Giulietta the fatal potion. These touches are disconcerting but not wilful. As the double tragedy looms closer, Benjamin Bernheim's Tebaldo sings of a 'terrible presentiment'; Loy and Schmidt accordingly bring past and present together, hinting at the terrible things that happened before curtain-up: abuse, guilt and scarring. Only occasionally does Loy overfill this minutely detailed canvas.

Zurich Opera's cast and conductor jump on board with admirable commitment. Fabio Luisi boldly sculpts the *cantabile* phrases without getting bogged down, and the orchestral playing is evocative, with pungent contributions from the winds. Of the bit-parts – in this opera, they really are – Alexei Botnariuc's Capellio fulminates effectively, Bernheim brings conflicted ardour to Tebaldo, and Roberto Lorenzi offers compassionate mercy as Lorenzo, if via a slightly muffled bass.

Yet Zurich really strikes gold with the triumphant pairing of Joyce DiDonato as Romeo and Olga Kulchynska as Giulietta. DiDonato's clothes and wig give her an unfortunate resemblance to Barbra

Streisand's Yentl, but the American mezzo is ferociously ardent and her attention to textual detail superb. Her denouement is tremendously affecting. Kulchynska's youth is only part of the reason why the talented Ukrainian is so moving here. She jumped into this show late but the production looks like it was mounted around her portrait of a lost, wounded soul, and she sings with silvery vulnerability.

Norma, filmed at the Liceu, hits few of the same targets. It's a scrappy, strenuous affair, the cameras catching in close-up the nervousness of choral singers and principals alike who are struggling to join the dots. I share their confusion.

Perhaps it's best to focus on the star. She is Sondra Radvanovsky, a soprano who has come relatively late to the touchstone *bel canto* roles – previously she was better known for heavier Verdi roles – but scores a triumph here. A few intonation lapses don't detract from the intelligent and imaginative way in which she shapes both recitatives and arias, rising to fervent climaxes as well as silken, ethereal *pianissimos*.

Yes, her 'Casta diva' is dispatched with juicy flair, but it's in the preceding lines that the soprano really shows her mettle. Here Radvanovsky astutely establishes Norma's divided loyalties rather than affecting to channel the voice of divine 'Irmisul'. Indeed, perhaps underneath the Medusa wig, *Mad Max* tattoos and an apricot gown that Margot Leadbetter from *The Good Life* would covet is a nuanced portrayal of a woman who has long since abandoned her faith for political expediency and, in so doing, has lost her way.

Sadly, Kevin Newbury's inexplicably well-travelled production gives her nothing to develop this idea (or replace it with something else). Aspiring to a mythic or timeless quality, Newbury's staging mostly channels new-age hokum. The giant barn of a set (designs by David Korins) is unhelpful: sometimes it's a temple, sometimes it's Norma's secret rooms, but the giant cow skulls on the walls



Kevin Newbury's production of Bellini's *Norma*, with designs by David Korins, at the Gran Teatre de Liceu in Barcelona

better suggest a Kentucky barbecue joint. Gregory Kunde's Pollione seems to have free access to the Gauls' secret rites, which makes the opening scenes even more opaque. There's little sense of claustrophobia, of an occupied people, or of Norma's double life.

Renato Palumbo is sensitive to mood and colour but doesn't shape the music urgently or theatrically enough; fold in the woolly stagecraft and the Act 2 scene for the chorus and Oroveso (Raymond Aceto, a little bland) almost brings things to a complete halt. Good support comes from Kunde's Pollione, delivered with style and vigour, and Ekaterina Gubanova's Adalgisa, sympathetic if lacking tonal variety. Radvanovsky deserves a grander sparring partner. **Neil Fisher**

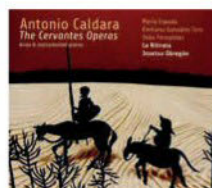
Caldara

'The Cervantes Operas'

Don Chisciotte in Corte della Duchessa -

Introduzione; Addio, Signor Padrone; Giacche debe andar così; Penso di già che appena; Primieramente, Sancio; Quel cor, che non vogl'io; Si l'abbiamo, Ricciardetto **Sancio Panza Governatore dell'isola Barattaria** - A dispetto del vento, e dell'onda; Confida al vento la sua speranza; Per tanti obblighazioni Signor; Venga pure in campo armato

María Espada *sop* Altisidora/Romiro
Emiliano González Toro *ten* Don Chisciotte
João Fernandes *bass*
 Sancio Panza/Don Alvaro/Diego
La Ritirata / Josetxu Obregón
 Glossa © GCD923104 (70' • DDD • T/t)



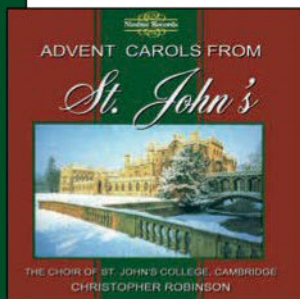
The Spanish ensemble La Ritirata and its Artistic Director (and cellist)

Josetxu Obregón present an ingenious programme that simultaneously celebrates the 400th anniversary of the death of Cervantes while exploring two obscure operas by Caldara based on episodes from *Don Quixote*. *Don Chisciotte in Corte della Duchessa* (1727) and *Sancio Panza Governatore dell'isola Barattaria* (originally completed in 1730 and revised in 1733) were both created for Vienna. To provide respite between vocal selections, La Ritirata play several ballets for falconers, peasants and satyrs, and knight-errants by Nicola Matteis the younger. The close recording in a reverberant environment works hard to balance prominent woodwinds with a small yet often vibrant string group.

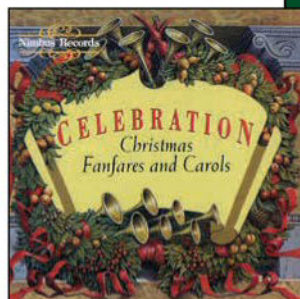
A variety of dramatic situations and musical moods is conjured by three soloists playing a range of six different Cervantine characters. Don Quixote's comparison of a situation to tales from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* is sung with charming wit by Emiliano González Toro, whose pinpoint rapid coloratura is thrilling when the would-be hero vows to fight a duel to avenge a young woman's betrayal ('Venga pure in campo armato'). María Espada's brightly florid singing in Altisidora's 'Penso di già che appena' (a reproach addressed to two different men) is accompanied delightfully by recorders. Sancho's acceptance that he must receive 3500 blows in order to undo a spell on a lady is sung with comedic warmth by João Fernandes (whose lyrical low notes are impressive). The simple string parts in a lovely Venetian-style villota in which Don Quixote sanctimoniously offers Polonius-like advice to Sancho could have been left alone to good enough effect without intrusive (and utterly anachronistic) psalter, and the over-active novelty also hinders Sancho's bathetic farewell 'Addio, Signor Padrone' (sung superbly by Fernandes). Whether or not one likes the artistic licence of post-historically informed capriciousness, these spirited performances



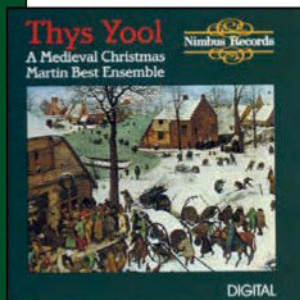
Christmas Titles



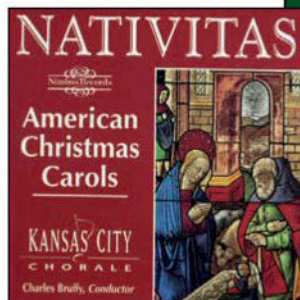
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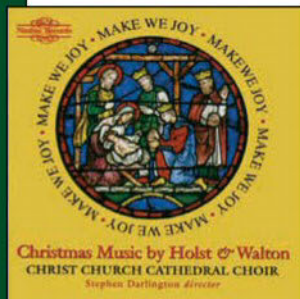
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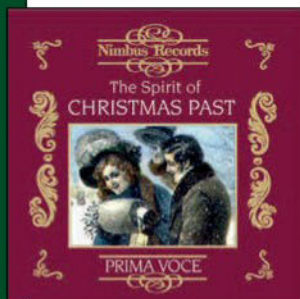
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João Fernandes and Emiliano González Toro recording Caldara with La Ritirata under Josetxu Obregón

afford a glimpse of how a literary genius of one epoch had a direct influence on operatic culture in a different country over a century later. **David Vickers**

Handel

'Mitologia'

Arianna in Creta - Bell'idol amato/Deh, taci crudel
Atalanta - Caro/Cara, nel tuo bel volto **Partenope** -
 Voglio amare infin ch'io moro Apollo e Dafne,
 HWV122 - Felicissima quest'alma. Echeggiate,
 festeggiate numi eterni, HWV119. Hercules,
 HWV60 - Where shall I fly?. *Parnasso in festa*,
 HWV73 - Dopo d'aver perduto il caro bene...Ho
 perso il caro ben; Già le furie vedo ancor. *Semele*,
 HWV58 - Overture; Come, Zephyrs, come; No, no,
 I'll take no less

Christiane Karg sop **Romina Basso** mez

Il Complesso Barocco / Alan Curtis

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 88875 19981-2
 (70' • DDD • T/I)



'Mitologia' runs the title of the late Alan Curtis's final Handel recording, a sequence of arias and duets on mythological themes that ranges over four decades, from the rare allegorical cantata *Echeggiate, festeggiate*,

numi eterni to the music dramas *Semele* and *Hercules*. In the 18th century the less savoury characters of Classical mythology would typically receive a civilising makeover. So the maliciously disruptive gods are seen on their best, most emollient behaviour in the wedding serenata *Parnasso in festa*, while the buccannering chancers Hercules and (in *Arianna in Creta*) Theseus become models of monogamy.

With five arias, Christiane Karg has the lion's share of this attractively varied programme. As ever, the German soprano 'lives' each of the characters intensely: in the blanched, grief-etched tone she brings to Orfeo's lament from *Parnasso in festa*, in Cupid's seductive 'Come, Zephyrs, come', sung with just the right knowing coquettishness, or as *Semele* sarcastically insisting that Jupiter reveal himself in his true guise. In dialogue with the alluring (unnamed) oboist, Karg embodies the vernal innocence of Dafne's ravishing 'Felicissima quest'alma' and uses the faint edge on her tone to advantage in *Partenope*'s vigorous defence of the unstable Arsace. Although her English is good, consonants (especially final consonants) could sometimes be clearer; and while she invariably ups the intensity in *da capos*, her elaborate embellishments can smother Handel's original melodic lines.

Romina Basso, too, is not shy over ornamentation, going manically berserk in the *da capo* of Jupiter's celebratory aria 'Echeggiate, festeggiate'. Her firm, slightly androgynous mezzo and fiery temperament immediately impress in the tremendous *ombra* aria from *Parnasso in festa* (recycled from the oratorio *Athalia*). In the famous 'mad scene' from *Hercules* Basso does not hold back as the despairing, raving Dejanira, though her strongly accented English is only intermittently decipherable (which probably wouldn't have worried the cosmopolitan Handel) and her lowest notes lack body. She and Karg make vivid, well-matched duet partners, whether in their euphoniously blended thirds and sixths in the *Atalanta* love duet, or the frisson of the duet in which Theseus seeks to reassure a distraught Ariadne of his constancy. If Curtis's direction tends to be stronger on elegance than dramatic energy, he invariably draws neat, pointed playing from his expert period band.

Although all the numbers were recorded in the same venue, the balances are inconsistent. Basso sounds much more closely miked than Karg, while the over-prominence of pizzicato violins and boomy double bass compromises the Arcadian enchantment of 'Felicissima quest'alma'.

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

VERISMO AND ITS ENVIRONS

Hugo Shirley explores new productions of cornerstones of the Romantic opera repertory, from *Cav* & *Pag* to *Otello*



Aleksandrs Antonenko and Sonya Yoncheva in the Metropolitan Opera's production of Verdi's *Otello*

The big opera houses of the world have been clearing out their old productions of repertory staples – the lavish, detailed period productions by the likes of Franco Zeffirelli – for a while now. But the question as to what to replace them with has been a difficult one, particularly when it comes to such works as the three (or four if, as I suppose we should, we uncouple the Mascagni-Leoncavallo double bill) featured here. *Cav* & *Pag* and *Andrea Chénier* are not the staples they once were, while *Otello* presents its own problems to contemporary directors. These productions show that there are a variety of approaches to presenting them for 21st-century audiences, but all three have at least one foot planted in the conservative camp.

In fact, with David McVicar's *Andrea Chénier*, it's less a case of feet planted in that camp than the camp having been cleared to erect a grand conservative chateau in its place – this is a production that could hardly be more traditional. From Bartlett Sher at the Met we have a production of *Otello* that is barely less traditional in its essentials, but which dons an unconvincing contemporary disguise.

Damiano Michielletto's *Cav* & *Pag* is far and away the most interesting, and is a

good complement to Philip Stölzl's fascinating Salzburg production (Sony Classical, 5/16). It arrived at Covent Garden hot on the heels of his controversial *Guillaume Tell*, whose now-infamous rape scene served to detract from what was an ugly and ill-conceived production of Rossini's *grand opéra* masterpiece. The Royal Opera management rushed to defend that, reminding us that it was art's duty to challenge, to question and push us out of our comfort zone.

For the Mascagni-Leoncavallo double bill, though, we seem to have a totally different Michielletto. This is a gentle updating – to the last decade or so of the 20th century, at a guess – that displays plenty of clever and witty touches, as well as some virtuoso stagecraft. Of his ideas, none of them controversial, the most significant is probably that of intertwining the two halves of the double bill. *Pag*'s Silvio works in the bakery that forms the centrepiece of *Cav*'s revolving set, and we see the early stages of his seduction of Nedda in the intermezzo. During the *Pagliacci* intermezzo, on the other hand, we see Santuzza finding forgiveness from a priest and consolation from Mamma Lucia.

Not all of Michielletto's ideas work, and the way that much of the play within the play is portrayed as Canio's nightmare

in *Pag* is just one element that seems overcomplicated. His emphasis on Elena Zilio's Mamma Lucia in *Cav* might get tiring on repeated viewings, too – she is forced into some pretty over-the-top scenery-chewing throughout. I longed for the great outdoors in *Pag*, which is staged entirely within the village hall complex where Canio's play is to take place; and for some southern sun in *Cav*, which plays out in a state of perpetual dusk.

But the production's packed with telling details. I liked the way, for example, that Canio's troupe are clearly all fed up after what feels like a very long and unrewarding time on the road. And it comes across extremely well on the screen, often feeling more like a film than a stage production.

Antonio Pappano conducts with customary passion and warmth, and the cast is very decent, too, with Carmen Giannattasio's frustrated Nedda especially vivid. Dimitri Platanias doesn't seem to be in his best voice but is a powerful presence in both dramas as Alfio and Tonio. Eva-Maria Westbroek performs with a moving honesty as Santuzza, even though her soprano tends towards stridency when you want it to fill out with Mediterranean warmth. The linchpin is Aleksandrs Antonenko, singing both Turiddù and Canio with power and focus, if again without quite the ideal warmth in terms of colour.

The Latvian tenor is also the linchpin of Sher's Met *Otello*, and sings the role tirelessly from an exciting opening 'Esultate' to a touching 'Nìun mi tema', even if once more we're short on *squillo* and Italianate colour. In Sonya Yoncheva he has a classy Desdemona in the grand manner, luxuriously sung and nobly acted, if not quite tugging at the heartstrings as does Marina Poplavskaya, the Desdemona to Antonenko's previous filmed *Otello* (from the 2008 Salzburg Festival under Muti – C Major Entertainment). Željko Lučić is dramatically excellent as a straightforwardly scheming and malevolent Iago, but the voice is a little dull in timbre and his tuning isn't always secure. The Met orchestra play fabulously for Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

At the time the production opened there was a big hoo-ha about it being the first at the Met not to put *Otello* in the once traditional blackface makeup. Dropping that practice is admirable – necessary, even – but Sher apparently hasn't given any thought to how the character's essential difference should otherwise be conveyed (his status as Moor is retained in the subtitles). There's no real sense of why Iago should be so obsessed with bringing about his downfall, or why *Otello* should have

the seeds of paranoia and insecurity in him that Iago exploits.

As such the drama feels undercooked, and much of the direction, particularly of the chorus, is painfully conventional – matters aren't helped by some jerky, in-your-face camerawork. Essentially it's a traditional production without the blackface and where the sets are Perspex rather than plasterboard. There's a grandeur to it, but a rather bland, glossy and inert grandeur. I'd stick with that earlier Antonenko DVD, which features a flawed but much more interesting staging by Stephen Langridge.

So, back to the Royal Opera House, where no one could accuse the grandeur of David McVicar's **Andrea Chénier** of being bland and inert. And whatever one thinks about his unapologetically 'traditional' take on the work, there's no doubting the skill and detail of his direction, or the painstaking care of Jenny Tiramani's costumes. It's all beautifully filmed, too. It's just that it all feels rather twee, especially in the scenes that are brightly lit: there's rarely not a periwigged fop, cheeky tart in frilly knickers or tricolour-waving paysan vying for attention somewhere in the background. Maybe Giordano's work is not itself greatly concerned with the political realities of The Terror, per se, but it's still surprising for a production of the work these days to present it in quite such purely decorative terms.

The cast features some familiar faces, with Lučić as Gérard – arguably the opera's most interesting character – displaying the same merits and faults as he does in the Met's *Otello*. Likewise Westbroek, whose Maddalena is as earnest and moving as her Santuzza. At the centre of it all is Jonas Kaufmann's Chénier – a very well-sung and impeccably acted performance. The drama just never quite ignites, though, despite some excellent additional performances – including a powerful cameo from Zilio again, here as Madelon – and Pappano's predictably big-hearted and passionate conducting. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Mascagni *Cavalleria rusticana*
Leoncavallo *Pagliacci* **Pappano**
Opus Arte (F) DVD OA1210D;
(F) OABD7200D



Verdi *Otello*
Nézet-Séguin
Sony Classical (F) DVD 8898530890-9;
(F) 88985 30891-9



Giordano *Andrea Chénier*
Pappano
Warner Classics (F) DVD 9029 59379-6;
(F) 9029 59377-9

Minor irritants aside, this is an enjoyable, uncliché programme, above all for Christiane Karg's contribution, and a worthy memorial to a Baroque pioneer who revived so many forgotten operas by Handel, Vivaldi et al. **Richard Wigmore**

Mozart

La clemenza di Tito

Carlo Allemano *ten*.....Tito
Nina Bernstein *sop*.....Vitellia
Kate Aldrich *mez*.....Sesto
Ann-Beth Solvang *mez*.....Annio
Dana Marbach *sop*.....Servilia
Marcell Bakonyi *bar*.....Publio
Chorus and Orchestra of the Academia Montis Regalis / Alessandro De Marchi
CPO (F) 2 CPO777 870-2 (143) • DDD • S/T
Recorded live at the Landestheater, Innsbruck,
August 5, 7, 9 & 11, 2013



Mozart composed *La clemenza di Tito* in great haste for the celebrations marking

the coronation of the Habsburg emperor Leopold II as King of Bohemia. Like *Don Giovanni*, therefore, the opera was first staged in Prague, in September 1791, and the title-role was written for Antonio Baglioni, the first Don Ottavio. The libretto was an old one by Metastasio, first set by Caldara in 1734, but it was completely refashioned and brought up to date by Caterino Mazzolà, who was briefly the court poet in Vienna at the time. It soon became popular, and indeed it was the first of Mozart's operas to be performed in London, in 1806. After a long period of neglect its stock has risen in recent years, thanks largely – in this country – to the Covent Garden production by Anthony Besch in 1974.

However, this is *Tito* with a difference. In 1804 the opera was mounted in Vienna with alterations including five new numbers: two by Joseph Weigl, two by an anonymous composer – possibly Weigl – and one by Johann Simon Mayr. Weigl, who had succeeded Salieri as director of the court opera, had worked with Mozart in the 1780s. His version affords a fascinating glimpse of the taste of the time. Annio's 'Tu fosti tradito' is omitted; more significantly, so are all three of Tito's arias, where Metastasio's words were left untouched by Mazzolà and set by Mozart in a formal, traditional manner. We are not told the author of the new verses: perhaps it was Mazzolà, who had earlier written librettos for both Weigl and Mayr. The first insertion, Tito's 'Splende di Roma',

incorporates the music of Mozart's march for the arrival of the emperor. A new duet for Tito and Sesto includes the first stanza of the omitted 'Del più sublime soglio', while the words of 'Ah, se fosse intorno' provide the opening for what is in effect a three-part aria. Mayr's contribution comes in Act 2: a slow section featuring the woodwind followed by a martial *Allegro* in which Tito rather improbably appeals to the chorus. Süssmayr's recitatives are retained, but Weigl sensibly dispenses with the long opening dialogue between Vitellia and Sesto.

The performance, from a staging in Innsbruck, is excellent, with no weak links. Alessandro De Marchi's tempi are sometimes surprisingly fast or slow (see Sesto's 'Parto' for an example of both), but the musicians cope admirably. The orchestra is crisp – I loved the blare of the interjected chords near the beginning of the Act 1 finale – and the enchanting woodwind playing includes dazzling obbligatos on the basset clarinet and basset-horn from Luca Lucchetta. Carlo Allemano sings with nobility and tenderness; he is particularly credible when trying to understand the reason for Sesto's treachery. Kate Aldrich is fluent in the roulades of 'Parto' and quite unfazed by De Marchi's very slow speed for 'Deh, per questo istanto'. As Vitellia, the cause of all the trouble, Nina Bernstein does jealousy and fury very well and even convinces you of her remorse.

Apart from the rather backward chorus, the recording is clear and well balanced, with pleasing antiphonal effects from the violins. However authentic it might be, I found the *secco* recitatives' spread chords on the cello (in lieu of a keyboard instrument) too gruff, as though Marcel from *Les Huguenots* were stomping round the stage. The tiny print of the booklet yields the libretto in Italian and German only. But this is well worth investigating.

Richard Lawrence

Rossini

Adelaide di Borgogna – Salve, Italia...O sacra alla virtù...Soffri la tua sventura. Serti intrecciar le vergini...Questi che a me presenta...Vieni, tuo sposo e amante...Al trono tuo primiero. **Demetrio e Polibio** – Pien di contento in seno. **Eduardo e Cristina** – Nel misero tuo stato...Ah! Chi sa dirmi se la sposa...La pietà che in sen serbate. **Matilde di Shabran** – Sazia tu fossi alfine...Ah, perché, perché la morte. **Semiramide** – Eccomi alfine in Babilonia...Ah, quel giorno ognor rammento. **Tancredi** – O sospirato lido...Dolci d'amor parole **Franco Fagioli** *countertenor* **Armonia Atenea Choir; Armonia Atenea / George Petrou**
DG (F) 479 5681GH (75) • DDD



There's a perverse irony that the only operatic role Gioachino Rossini

wrote for a castrato – Arsace in *Aureliano in Palmira* – isn't included on Franco Fagioli's new disc devoted to the composer. Rossini composed it for Giambattista Velluti (1780-1861), regarded as the last great castrato, but also famed for being a bit of a diva. Bernhard Neuhoff's booklet-note tells us that apparently Rossini himself narrowly missed the snip as a child, so perhaps he had a special affinity with the unbroken voice. Castration was going out of fashion – Napoleon even banned the practice – so 'trouser roles' were part of Rossini's compositional armoury. Fagioli essays half a dozen of them here.

The Argentinian countertenor certainly has a distinctive, plum-coloured voice, very mezzo-ish in timbre, ranging somewhere between Cecilia Bartoli and Ewa Podles. However, while Fagioli has quite remarkable florid agility, he lacks Bartoli's evenness of tone across the registers, with the odd alarming descent into baritone territory. He certainly throws himself into high notes with abandon – a white-knuckle ride on occasions, with the sense that he's just about clinging on by his coat-tails.

Two excerpts showcase Ottone from *Adelaide di Borgogna*, the Act 2 cabaletta coming off splendidly. Edoardo's 'Ah, perché, perché la morte' from *Matilde di Shabran* is even more virtuoso, scuppered by some rather fruity horn intonation in the terrifying obbligato passages. The most familiar aria is Arsace's 'Ah, quel giorno ognor rammento' from *Semiramide*, athletically dispatched. This is the only crossover in repertoire with Max Emanuel Cencic's all-Rossini disc (Erato, A/07), with Fagioli's darker tone preferable. Greater duplication occurs on Angelo Manzotti's 2002 Bongiovanni album, which is worth hearing (once) for some distressing intonation.

Aside from some scratchy string tone, George Petrou and his Armonia Atenea provide lively support. **Mark Pullinger**

Wagner

Die Walküre (Act 1)

René Kollo *ten*.....Siegfried

Eva-Maria Bundschuh *sop*.....Sieglinde

John Tomlinson *bass*.....Hunding

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Klaus Tennstedt

LPO © LPO0092 (69' • DDD • S/T)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, October 7 & 10, 1991



Die Walküre's popular but tricky First Act feels like an action piece because

of its hectic beginning and ending. Yet a large part of it consists of narrative. The secret of this long-lost performance lies in its casting: three singers who, together with their conductor, are compelling storytellers in music. René Kollo and the little-known (here) DDR star Eva-Maria Bundschuh may not have been (unlike John Tomlinson) in the most lustrous of voice towards the end of rich stage careers but they tell their middle-of-the-act tales of Walsung distress with imagination and emotional clarity.

Tennstedt himself is not a colourist in this music like Clemens Krauss (compare the reading in his complete Bayreuth *Ring* on Orfeo or Pristine). His performance is not at all the dark, tense, neurotic experience you might expect after those late, live Mahler records. The act's natural climaxes in Sieglind's narration and at the drawing of the sword are less shattering in decibels than Goodall's (Chandos, 12/00) or Klemperer's (Warner). But they are truly and fully delivered. The tension is all the more uncanny through being subtly applied.

Without melodramatic distortion or over-painting of the music's written line, Tennstedt makes sure that everyone playing or singing is given cannily judged musical time. His phrasing is both attentive to the drama and in parts spaciouly luxuriant, although a forward pulse is never lacking. Such close understanding and realisation of Wagner's text-setting from all concerned helps Tennstedt recover the magic rather missing from his studio Wagner (although not from his perhaps misdated 'bleeding chunks' concert also on this orchestra's label).

If you want to hear bigger and/or more purely beautiful voices in this act you're almost spoiled for choice, ranging from the pre-war Lauritz Melchior/Lotte Lehmann/Bruno Walter set (Warner) to the 1980s Siegfried Jerusalem/Jessye Norman/Marek Janowski (RCA). But the present concert – one of Tennstedt's rare returns to opera in his later career in the West and which has taken a quarter of a century to find an official release – is a well-worked triumph for its intelligent and experienced performers.

Mike Ashman

'Molière à l'opéra'

'Vocal and instrumental pieces from the *comédies-ballets* created by Molière'

Excerpts from **Charpentier** *Le mariage forcé*.

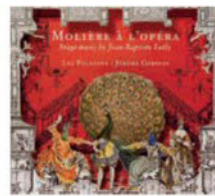
Le Sicilien Lully *Les amants magnifiques*.

Le bourgeois gentilhomme. *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. *Pastorale comique*.

La princesse d'Elide. *Psyché*

Les Paladins / Jérôme Correas

Glossa © GCD923509 (73' • DDD • T/t)



This excellent exploration of the relationship between Lully and Molière

derives from a stage show first seen in Reims last year, much revived since, and at the time of writing still on tour. It draws together songs and instrumental numbers from the *intermèdes* and incidental music that Lully provided for Molière's plays and *comédies-ballets* during their 10-year collaboration, together with a couple of items by Charpentier, who became Molière's composer after he and Lully fell out in 1671.

Jérôme Correas, the project's prime mover, argues that the theatrical and psychological surety that Lully displays in his later *tragédies lyriques* derives from his work as both composer and performer with Molière and his company. There is much here that pre-empt his more familiar scores: haunting slow arias; brief pastoral scenes that say everything we need to know about love, jealousy and reconciliation; and exquisite ensembles, above all 'Dormez, dormez, beaux yeux' from *Les amants magnifiques*.

But we're also very aware that the loss of Lully's comedic brilliance was the price of the rift between the two and his subsequent move towards more serious territory. The notorious enema duet from *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* is included: Lully played one of the doctors, Molière the patient at the premiere. But even better is a scene for two lawyers from the same work, a preposterous chaconne, in which one repeatedly proclaims that 'polygamy is a hangable offence' to the ground bass, while the other loses himself in verbiage in the variations over it. The ensemble 'A moi, Monsieur!' depicting a badly behaved theatre audience from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, meanwhile, remains one of the great satirical moments in music.

The performers throw themselves into it with engaging gusto. Correas encourages what he calls 'parlé-chanté' for the comic scenes, at which tenor Jérôme Billy and bass Virgile Ancely excel as doctors, lawyers and provincial bourgeois. Tenor

Jean-François Lombard and soprano Luanda Siqueira are allotted the more lyrical arias: he's very eloquent in the First Spaniard's air from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*; she's particularly ravishing in L'Aurore's aria from *La princesse d'Elide*, one of the loveliest things Lully ever wrote. Correas presides over it all with brilliant wit and deep sensitivity. 'What pleasures we've enjoyed', the vocal quartet sings at the end. You can't help but agree. **Tim Ashley**

'Oh, Boy!'

Chabrier L'étoile - O petite étoile! (Romance de l'étoile) **Gluck/Berlioz** Orphée et Eurydice - Amour, viens rendre à mon âme **Gounod** Faust - Versez vos chagrins dans mon âme. **Roméo et Juliette** - Depuis hier je cherche en vain mon maître...Que fais tu, blanche tourterelle **Hahn** Mozart - Alors, adieu donc, mon amour, le destin nous sépare **Massenet** Cendrillon - Allez, laissez moi...Coeur sans amour **Meyerbeer** Les Huguenots - Nobles Seigneurs, salut! **Mozart** La clemenza di Tito - Parto, parto. *La finta giardiniera* - Va' pure ad altri in braccio. **Lucio Silla** - Pupille amate; Il tenero momento. *Le nozze di Figaro* - Non so più; Voi che sapete **Offenbach** Les contes d'Hoffmann - Vois sous l'archet frémissant. **Fantasio** - Voyez dans la nuit brune (Ballade à la lune) **Thomas** Psyché - Non, ne la suivons pas... *Sommeil* ami des dieux (Romance du sommeil)

Marianne Crebassa *mez* Salzburg
Mozarteum Orchestra / Marc Minkowski ^{aspr}
Erato © 9029 59276-2 (73) • DDD • T/I



'Oh, Boy!' is Marianne Crebassa's first album since she signed for Erato

earlier this year. The French mezzo, who caused something of a stir in Salzburg, first in Handel's *Tamerlano* in 2012, then in Mozart's *Lucio Silla* a year later, explores trouser roles in operas by Mozart and by 19th-century French composers, together with 'Amour, viens rendre à mon âme' from Gluck's *Orphée* in the Berlioz edition. She has a wide-ranging voice, with an appealing tang in her lower registers and a soprano-like brilliance at the top, which allows her to ascend effortlessly to the high C in Urbain's first aria from *Les Huguenots*. Her coloratura is superbly fluent and strikingly delivered, one notices, on the vowel sounds in the texts rather than shaded towards 'a', as one finds with many singers in this repertoire.

On this showing, however, she is more at ease in her native French than when singing

in Italian. This is not to denigrate her Mozart, which is beautiful and spirited, with 'Pupille amate' from *Lucio Silla* wistfully floated and Ramiro's 'Va' pure ad altri in braccio' from *La finta giardiniera* delivered with considerable ferocity. It's just that when she turns to the French repertoire, a stronger imagination and greater depths of verbal subtlety come into play. Urbain's flippant wit is sharply contrasted with the more caustic humour of the page Stéphanie in Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. At the disc's mid-point come three slow, sad arias, all of them sung with fastidious beauty of line; but the erotic regret expressed by Price Charming in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, Fantasio's slightly crazed contemplation of the moon and Siébel's shy devotion to Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* all inhabit very different emotional territory. As at Salzburg in 2012, she's paired with Marc Minkowski, just as much at home in Mozart as he is in the French repertory. There's some exquisite playing from the Mozarteum Orchestra, too. **Tim Ashley**

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Alban Gerhardt © Kasper Kikva

REISSUES

Hugo Shirley on a handful of classic opera sets, **Fabrice Fitch** on a L'Oiseau-Lyre box and **James Jolly** samples some recent boxed releases

Opera de luxe and de rigueur

The major labels still seem to be a little unsure of exactly how to treat their extensive back catalogues. This is shown by the fact that Warner Classics has released, almost simultaneously, both a new batch of lavishly packaged remastered issues of individual operas and a budget box of Riccardo Muti's complete EMI Verdi recordings. For what you'd pay for a couple of the former (about £24 for the two discs sets and £34 for the three), you'd be able to buy all 28 CDs (plus bonus DVD) of the latter (about £50). Since one of the remastered classic sets is a Muti Verdi recording, though, one assumes no one anticipates much overlap in the prospective audiences.

That the Muti recording in question is *La traviata* with Renata Scotto and Alfredo Kraus (recorded in 1980) might raise eyebrows. It seems as though the series might be designed as much to cement the position of acknowledged classics as to encourage reassessment of some that have been rather overlooked (although it's worth noting that this *Traviata* has already appeared as one of EMI's Great Recordings of the Century).

Certainly the set has its virtues, but the leading couple had been singing their roles since as far back as the 1950s – Scotto made her debut as Violetta while still a teenager, while Kraus was Alfredo to Callas's famous Lisbon Violetta in 1958. With a youthful Renato Bruson called upon to play Germont père, it doesn't feel quite right. There's an enormous amount to admire in the well-drilled playing of the Philharmonia, however, as well as the experience Kraus and Scotto bring to their roles. The tenor is still impeccably elegant, although the dryness in the tone is a problem. Five years after she recorded Abigaille in Muti's *Nabucco*, Scotto's voice is mature-sounding and short on limpidity. The authority and sincerity are undeniable, but I can't imagine anyone preferring her performance here to that on the 1962 DG

set with La Scala forces under Antonino Votto, Muti's teacher.

Another surprising choice, perhaps, is the *Tosca*. It's Callas, but not *the* Callas. Instead of the famous 1953 set under de Sabata, we have the 1965 recording from Paris under Georges Prêtre. This was the great diva's last studio hurrah, and of course both she and, to a certain extent, Tito Gobbi are heard in a better light in that earlier recording – their Act 2 confrontation here does at one point descend into a rather unedifying shouting match. But Callas's dramatic conviction shines through despite the occluded mid-range and the dodgy top, while Carlo Bergonzi is in his prime as Cavaradossi. I find Prêtre's conducting a little stodgy, the engineering rather flat and the sound effects – this recording was going to be the soundtrack for a film that was never made – occasionally distracting. Nevermind, though: there's still enough great artistry captured here to make it worth getting to know.

We're on safer 'classic recording' ground with the remaining three reissues: in reverse chronological order, Otto Klemperer's 1964 *Magic Flute*, Giulini's 1959 *Don Giovanni* and Beecham's *Carmen*. Returning to the *Carmen* (recorded in 1958 and 1959), I was a little shocked at the sound in the Prelude, where the percussion makes an almighty clatter while the rest of the orchestra sounds very distant. The engineering settles down, though, and is generally excellent in its cleaned-up guise. And the pleasure of hearing an entirely francophone cast surrounding the leading couple is immense. Victoria de los Angeles's *Carmen* is gently but irresistibly seductive – more civilised than we're used to hearing from many a chesty mezzo these days. Nicolai Gedda's lyrical, plaintive Don José is a good match. Janine Micheau and Ernst Blanc are wonderful as Micaëla and Escamillo, and Beecham's conducting is as fresh as a daisy.

If Beecham's Bizet hasn't aged at all, Mozart-conducting has gone through

Riccardo Muti conducts 11 Verdi operas plus the Requiem and Four Sacred Pieces in this 28-CD set

a lot of changes since the Giulini *Don Giovanni* and the Klemperer *Zauberflöte*. There are times, then, when especially the German maestro's conducting feels slow and stately, even if the copper-bottomed integrity of his approach silences a fair many doubts. It's also a set that boasts one of the starriest casts ever assembled: Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Christa Ludwig and Marga Höffgen are the Three Ladies, for example, Josephine Veasey crops up as one of the three unboyish (in all senses) boys. The young Gundula Janowitz is predictably wonderful as Pamina, while Lucia Popp's Queen of the Night is pretty much unbeatable. Gottlob Frick is not well cast, though, as Sarastro, and Gedda, while he by no means lets the side down, is a more natural Don José than Tamino. The set leaves out all dialogue.

The virtues of Giulini's *Don Giovanni* are well known, with a cast that includes Eberhard Waechter's irresistible Giovanni, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's fiery Donna Elvira and Joan Sutherland's full-throttle, if rather more broad-brush Anna. There are so many wonderful things here, not least what must remain one of the most powerful Supper Scenes on record, built up with unerring sense of drama and architecture by Giulini – and where the granitic Frick is much better cast as the Commendatore.



The presentation of these sets is beautiful. Each includes a full libretto with translations and a newly commissioned essay about the recording, plus some wonderful archive photos of the sessions themselves. It's all housed in a little cloth-bound book, which, exactly the same size as the traditional double- or triple-disc jewel case, will fit on CD shelves. They are a real treat.

The presentation for **The Verdi Collection** feels especially measly in comparison: the booklet has no biography even of Muti, no information on the operas, no track-listings (they are found on the back of the CD sleeves). The second and third discs of the *Don Carlo* were also mislabeled in my copy. What the booklet does contain is a timeline outlining the dates of Verdi, Toscanini, Votto and Muti. This genealogy explains something of Muti's approach, defined by discipline and punch and firm respect for the text: we tend to get second verses of cabalettas, and many of the standard interpolations are cleared out. The orchestral playing is always meticulously balanced and imbued with a strong sense of forward momentum, as can be heard in the devilish fizz of the witch's chorus in the *Macbeth*, recorded in London in 1976. This can teeter over into a certain relentlessness, though, as is the case at

times in the rather studio-bound *Rigoletto*, recorded in Milan in 1986 (not 1976, as per the booklet) and 1988.

The locations tell some of the story of the set, reflecting the time that Muti spent in London as Klemperer's successor as Principal Conductor of the (New) Philharmonia from 1973, and his increasing engagement with La Scala, where he became Music Director in 1986. This change is reflected in the casts, too. The La Scala recordings have an Italian emphasis, those from the 1970s are more international: the classic 1974 *Aida* with Domingo and Caballé, which still holds up very well; that *Macbeth* with Sherill Milnes in the title-role, a young Carreras as a thrilling Macduff and an imperious Lady Macbeth from Fiorenza Cossotto; the excellent Domingo-Arroyo *Ballo*. There's also a terrific London *Nabucco* (1977-8), where three principals are Italian: Scotto's fearless Abigaille alongside the excellent Matteo Manuguerra (*Nabucco*) and Veriano Luchetti (*Ismaele*).

The move to La Scala also meant more live recordings. The 1982 *Ernani* with Freni, Domingo and Bruson can lay claim to being one of the most recommendable in the catalogue (using a fuller text than many of its competitors). At the more recent end of the spectrum is the excellent *Vespri Siciliani* captured in December 1989

and January 1990, with Cheryl Studer and Chris Merritt leading an otherwise Italian cast – 'a thrilling record of Italy's leading house at its best', wrote Alan Blyth in these pages. Less entirely successful are the 1986 *Forza*, and the 1992 *Don Carlo*, given in just the standard four-act Italian version that was first performed at La Scala. The latter is interesting primarily for capturing Pavarotti's short-lived engagement with the title role (he was famously booed at the premiere), as well as an occasionally overstretched but authentically Italianate Elisabetta from the late Daniela Dessì.

Dessì is just one of several Italian singers it's great to have captured multiple times in this box, and she is Gilda to the Rigoletto of another, Giorgio Zancanaro, whose healthy, handsome and impeccably schooled baritone can also be heard on the *Vespri* and *Forza* as well as the exciting studio *Attila* recorded in 1989, opposite Cheryl Studer's fearless Odabella and Samuel Ramey's stalwart Atilla. Beyond the 11 operas we have a characteristically sharp-focused and fiery 1979 Requiem (with Scotto, Agnes Baltsa, Luchetti and Evgeny Nesterenko) and a noble recording of the *Quattro Pezzi Sacri* with the Berlin PO and the Stockholm Radio Choir.

The additional DVD brings us up to speed with Muti's career after La Scala – he left in 2005. It's less a strict documentary than loosely assembled footage of an extensive interview, performances and rehearsal from Chicago and Rome, and an illustrated talk given by the conductor. But it makes for fascinating viewing and gives a valuable insight into the approach that Muti applies throughout the set, remarkably consistent over several decades and unfailingly engaging and rewarding.

Hugo Shirley

THE RECORDINGS

Verdi *La traviata* Muti

Warner Classics De Luxe Opera Series (F) ②
2564 64831-8

Puccini *Tosca* Prêtre

Warner Classics De Luxe Opera Series (F) ②
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Time travel

An offshoot of the much older L'Oiseau-Lyre label, the Florilegium series was the brainchild of the producer Peter Wadland, who oversaw it until his untimely death in 1992. This handsome box set includes 50 recordings made between 1974 (the year in which the series was launched) and 1995. The sleeve for each CD is of card, exactly reproducing the album cover of the original issue. The booklet includes comprehensive track-listings and two essays presenting the repertory and the label in context (though the albums' original sleeve-notes have been dropped for reasons of space).

This set offers a selection of the series' recordings of the medieval and Renaissance periods. Somewhat misleadingly given its nomenclature, it extends well into the Baroque (up to Monteverdi, Frescobaldi, Lawes and Jenkins). As regards coverage, one might suggest that Elizabethan England is disproportionately represented compared to EMI's Reflexe series, which coincided almost exactly with Florilegium in terms of its own chronology and historical time-span (the Continental series was weighted more heavily in favour of the medieval period, particularly in its early days). That's less a reflection of Florilegium's discography than a quirk of this particular set. The biggest losers are the French Renaissance and Monteverdi, who is represented by only a single disc (and makes barely an appearance in the companion Baroque set). If that seems like a gripe, it's worth emphasising just how welcome is the rediscovery of so many individual programmes: though several have been reissued on CD at least once, a fair proportion has been unavailable for some time. Another essential point is the label's pioneering spirit: how many labels today would consider issuing the complete songs of Dufay and Ockeghem and the entire contents of a 15th-century songbook (12 LPs in total) within the space of two years?

From the series' early years, The Consort of Musicke makes most of the running, followed in the early and mid-80s by the Medieval Ensemble of London, and in the late 80s and 90s by the New London Consort. (Christopher Hogwood appears as soloist in programmes devoted to Elizabethan keyboard music and Frescobaldi.) The early/mid-1980s were arguably Florilegium's heyday, in that both The Consort of Musicke and the Medieval Ensemble of London (among others) had



reached the height of their powers. The achievement of the Medieval Consort of London is particularly worth recalling, for its place in the discography of the early Renaissance has been unfairly overlooked since. In retrospect it was unfortunate that its most ambitious projects (Dufay and Ockeghem), made early on, are less polished than subsequent recordings (Machaut, Josquin, Isaac and 15th-century English song), which comfortably stand the test of time. The Dufay project (originally six LPs) is reduced here to a single disc, itself of variable quality; but otherwise the Medieval Ensemble of London is arguably the set's greatest beneficiary, for the remainder of the ensemble's output is included – not least the 'complete works' of the wonderful Jacob de Senlesches, whose six surviving songs marks him as one of the great composers of the 14th century.

The early/mid-1980s were arguably Florilegium's heyday

The Consort of Musicke's only foray into the 15th century is the justly celebrated complete recording of the *Chansonier Cordiforme*, which has had several outings on CD. For all that some of the earlier recordings are also less polished, it's a delightful shock to hear an impossibly youthful-sounding Emma Kirby in Gibbons's 'The Silver Swan' (1975). Although the focus is primarily on the Elizabethans (Morley, Wilbye, Coprario, Holborne and of course Byrd and Dowland), The Consort's recordings of Lassus, Gesualdo and Monteverdi, made slightly later in its residency, are among its finest efforts. It's worth recalling a time before the emergence of Concerto Italiano, La Venexiana *et al*, whose way was arguably prepared by Anthony Rooley's focus on intonation, clarity of form, and sensitivity to the text. All the more shame that only the Fourth Book of The Consort's



Anthony Rooley features in the latest L'Oiseau-Lyre box set

Monteverdi madrigal recordings for Florilegium is included here (to my ear, they are more successful than the later complete set for Virgin Classics).

When Rooley & Co moved over to Virgin Classics in the late 1980s, the New London Consort took its place as Florilegium's most visible ensemble on the early side. Its repertorial coverage exceeds the scope of this set, which is itself fairly selective (the four-volume *Carmina Burana* survey is represented by just the first) and tends towards the early side. My personal favourites are a very engaging Oswald von Wolkenstein recital (in which Catherine Bott, Paul Agnew, Michael George and Simon Grant excel as soloists) and the riotous but polished 'Sylvan and Oceanic Delights of Posilipo', a 17th-century cornucopia of dance music that's infectiously exuberant from end to end. Given Bott's close association with the group and the label, it's fitting that she should have a disc all to herself: her trouvère recital is one of the set's highlights, a master-class in constructing an entire programme around just the one human voice.

A handful of these recordings are new to CD. The fine selections of Byrd's and William Lawes's consort music have been superseded, but those devoted to Tromboncino and the secular music of Matteo da Perugia and Heinrich Isaac contain music that is still rarely heard. The Isaac disc is still one of the finest recordings ever devoted to that much-neglected composer. **Fabrice Fitch**

THE RECORDING

'L'Oiseau-Lyre: Medieval & Renaissance'

Various artists

Decca © (50 discs) 94788104

Half a dozen superb box sets

The death of the pianist Zoltán Kocsis (see page 141) prompts a rather belated notice for a superb set issued earlier this year by Decca, **Béla Bartók Complete Works** (32 CDs selling for about £55). It says much for the central role of Hungarian musicians in the classical music world that Decca didn't have to 'buy in' many recordings to make a complete survey (there are a handful of Hungaroton and BMC recordings, mainly of vocal music needed to top up the offerings from Decca, Philips and DG). With conductors like Fricsay, Kertész, Dorati, Solti and Iván Fischer, and instrumentalists like Kocsis, Székeley, Foldes and Anda well represented there's an authentically Hungarian flavour to the set.

Many old friends are here: Fischer's Concerto for Orchestra, the Chung First Violin Concerto, the Kocsis/Fischer piano concertos, the Kertész *Bluebeard*, the Takács string quartets, the Argerich/Kovacevich *et al* Sonata for two pianos and percussion, Kocsis's wonderful piano works as well as some historic classics (the Anda/Fricsay piano concertos and Székeley Second Violin Concerto among them).

Listening to this music, it's hard not to be struck – on every single disc – by Bartók's astounding sound world, his very distinctive modernity and his prodigious talent. Treat yourself!

Perahia's are wonderfully considered performances that balance head and heart

Reger: The Centenary Collection comes from Warner Classics, and makes a nice introduction to a composer I always feel more 'sinned against than sinning'. The delightful *Hiller* and *Mozart* Variations fill the first disc – the latter nicely done by Joseph Keilberth (though Christian Thielemann's exquisite Proms performance this year is hard to dispel from the memory). *A Ballet Suite* is a charmer and I enjoyed the orchestration (from the string quintet) of the *Liebestraum*. Mark Latimer's disc of the *Bach* and *Telemann* Variations got quite a drubbing from Jeremy Nicholas, and even though I learned the *Telemann* from Jorge Bolet (cited by JN), I enjoyed this different approach. Latimer certainly has the measure of these scores, as well as the technique (the piano sound is very fine). They're slightly smaller scaled than Bolet's performances, but nicely detailed. As a make-weight, Konstantin Scherbakov's version of the

Improvisation on *An die schönen blauen Donau* is a charmer from a very different sort of pianist (one rather more in the Bolet/Cherkassky school). Two and a half discs of organ music – worth exploring – slightly unbalance the set, but the songs and choral music are terrific, and to have the likes of Fischer-Dieskau, Olaf Bär and Christa Ludwig sing them is a treat. Selling for about £18, well worth a punt.

A couple of self-recommending piano reissues next. Sony Classical has gathered **Murray Perahia's** solo Beethoven recordings together in a five CD set (15 piano sonatas as well as the 32 *Variations on an Original Theme* and the *Für Elise* Bagatelle). These are wonderfully considered performances that balance head and heart to make for some really enjoyable and challenging listening.

The same might be said (except for the challenging bit!) about Eric Le Sage's **Poulenc** set (six CDs). As well as the piano music – which he does with the ideal balance of insouciance and intensity – there are the two piano concertos and *Aubade*, and all the sonatas with a superb line-up of soloists. Buckets of charm here, in very good sound.

André Previn's 1970s recordings for EMI of **Tchaikovsky's** three ballet scores (*Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*) are notable for some truly magnificent playing by the LSO (particularly from the winds and brass). As John Warrack has said in these pages, 'Previn, with minimal experience of ballet conducting, repends to the colour and animation of the music'. Brimful of melody and crafted with real skill, this is a set that will guarantee hours of pleasure.

A genuine classic of the gramophone next: Artur Schnabel's set of the **Beethoven** piano sonatas, recorded between 1932 and 1935, and something like the 'ur-recording' for anyone studying these works. No pianist can ignore it and no one interested in major milestones in the history of the recording industry



Artur Schnabel's pioneering 1930s Beethoven piano sonata cycle has never sounded so good

can overlook it either. It's sounding very good in this latest incarnation – do bear in mind its age, but once you've tuned in, the rewards are immense. I think what Schnabel does so magnificently is convey the growing ambition and technical mastery that a journey through the sonatas must acknowledge. The eight CDs (selling for about £18) come with a very short note by Max Harrison (mis-spelt) that says a lot in a short space – rather more is demanded by a set of this stature.

James Jolly

THE RECORDINGS

'Béla Bartók: Complete Works'

Various artists Decca © (32 discs) 578 9311

Reger 'The Centenary Collection'

Various artists

Warner Classics mono/stereo © ⑧ 9029 95974-8

'Murray Perahia plays Beethoven'

Perahia Sony Classical © ⑤ 8884 30131-2

'Eris Le Sage plays Poulenc'

Le Sage

Sony Classical © ⑥ 8898 532199-2

Tchaikovsky Ballets

LSO / Previn

Warner Classics © ⑧ 9029 59744-8

Beethoven Complete Piano Sonatas

Schnabel

Warner Classics mono © ⑧ 9029 59750-5

In a new monthly feature, the Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of the month's best new recordings

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Charlie Haden & Liberation Music Orchestra

Time/Life (Song for the Whales and Other Things)

Impulse! 479848; Rec 2011 and 2015



The Liberation Music Orchestra make a welcome reappearance on record.

Two tracks were recorded with Haden at the helm at the 2011 Middelheim Jazz Festival in Antwerp. At the time his plan was to write material for an album protesting at environmental damage. Unfortunately, his health intervened, culminating in his death in July 2014. His wife and manager Ruth Cameron was determined to see the project through, turning to Carla Bley to provide further charts, who duly obliged with the title track, 'Silent Spring' and

'Utviklingssang' with her husband Steve Swallow in Haden's stead on electric bass. 'Time/Life' is a highlight of the tracks without Haden, with the two live tracks – 'Blue in Green' and 'Song for the Whales' – marking a perfect valedictory statement for one of jazz's great ensembles. **Stuart Nicholson**

Mike Westbrook

Paris

ASC Records ASCCD 166; Rec July 19-20, 2016



In what seems another life, this correspondent asked Sir Mike if he felt he'd under presented his piano-playing on recordings, and here's the answer: an hour of solo piano that is fresh, rich and improvised, yet references a myriad of the master's many previous musical lives. Recorded live over two nights in the intimacy of a Parisian art gallery by

long-time collaborator Jon Hiseman, the songs seem to segue seamlessly into each other, in a gorgeous free-associative swirl. But the album is actually subtly divided into four – 'The Front Page', 'Bar-Room Piano', 'Love Stories' and 'The Blues'. Through each cluster of songs, Westbrook nests together his loves, heroes and inspirations, the man and his music, the music and the man as one. So we actually start with two songs from this year's big band apocalypse, *A Bigger Show*, but there's also material from his theatre work, there's quotes from his paeans to Ellington ('Sophisticated Lady', 'Solitude') and The Beatles ('Because', 'She Loves You') and work devised with his muse, Kate ('Gaudy Bar', 'My Lover's Coat'), and splendid surprises like 'You Make Me Feel Brand New'. But it's all really one big love song, to music, to life: the show, indeed, does go on. **Andy Robson**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Featuring musicians of the Calais 'Jungle'

The Calais Sessions

CitizensUK



One weekend in 2015, a group of international musicians based in the UK visited the now-demolished refugee and migrant camp in Calais known as 'The Jungle'. Their mission was to find musicians with whom they could collaborate and within an hour, four Syrian musicians – two from London and two from the camp – had formed a group. A makeshift studio was set up and this extraordinarily moving album was recorded over eight months by a team of volunteers that included musicians from Jamiroquai, Submotion Orchestra, The Boxer Rebellion and the Allegri Quartet, who made regular

visits to the camp to work with refugees not only from Syria but also Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Kuwait, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Every track is radically different and yet the pain of exile and the intoxicating dream of a better future lends an emotional cohesion. The human tragedy behind this powerful music will reduce you to tears. But as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit, it will also uplift your heart. **Nigel Williamson**

Daoiri Farrell

True Born Irishman

Daoiri Recordings



On the strength of this thrillingly resonant collection from Dublin-based singer and bouzouki player Daoiri Farrell, it's not too hard to understand why the mighty Dónal Lunny has championed him as 'one of the

most important traditional singers to emerge in the last decade'. Farrell has already been referred to in some circles as a Paul Brady for his generation and, certainly, the vocal comparisons with Brady are inescapable. More importantly, he shares with him a clarity of delivery that doesn't mask his honest passion for the songs he's collected. A couple of them, 'The Blue Tar Road' and 'My Love Is A Well', come from the late Liam Weldon, an acknowledged influence, and there are familiar tunes too from the repertoire of Christy Moore (who was another early supporter of the young player), and The Fureys. A TV performance by Moore inspired the former electrician to change professions and spend several years cutting his teeth in sessions across Dublin, while he studied music and bided his time preparing an album that could yet prove to be one of the most significant Irish releases of recent years. **Kevin Bourke**

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Schoenberg's Second String Quartet launches two very different listening journeys

Songs with/out words

Schoenberg uses songs both with and without words in his Second Quartet, including a biting satirical instrumental quotation of an Austrian folksong, *O du lieber Augustin*. Haydn, as so often, got there first. The finale of not only Symphonies Nos 103 and 104 but also the **Quartets Op 33** No 3 and Op 71 No 1 brought rosy-cheeked Croatian folk to the salons of London and Vienna.

Brahms was the pivotal figure of musical Romanticism, according to Schoenberg, and it was Brahms who reworked the slow movement's theme in Op 33 No 1 to open his Second Symphony. The Dudok Quartet arranged the sad songs without words of **Brahms's late piano music**; as a fleeting coda to the **Second Quartet** itself, the Kuss Quartet and Mojca Erdmann have recorded *Wie Melodien zieht es mir*, a fleeting glimpse of Expressionism in late Brahms. Having absorbed the example of their teacher, Berg and Webern well understood how to heighten the expressive power of a text with the colours of an expanded string quartet. Ever since George Perle discovered the hidden programme of clandestine love in Berg's **Lyric Suite**, quartets such as the Emersons have played the finale with the previously unset song. Among the most exquisite and rewarding of **Webern's song-cycles** is Op 14, which sets poems by Georg Trakl for a miniature *Pierrot Lunaire* ensemble.

In a hair-raising version of Trakl's **Revelation and Fall** (1966), Peter Maxwell Davies revived and expanded Schoenberg's ensemble with three percussionists. Max's contemporary Harrison Birtwistle returned to soprano and quartet for both voiced and mute reflections on the Holocaust by Paul Celan in **Pulse Shadows**. The poetry of Hölderlin takes on a vestigial, ghostly presence in **Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima**, where Luigi Nono asks it to be 'sung inwardly' by the quartet. **Aribert Reimann** brings us full circle with his song-cycles after Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms in which verse and song accompaniments are transcribed for quartet and linked by his own, fleeting, often Schoenbergian contributions. **Peter Quantrill**

Haydn String Quartets Op 33 Casals Qt
Harmonia Mundi

Brahms Music for String Quartet Dudok Qt Resonus

Brahms. Schoenberg Quartets Kuss Qt Onyx

Berg Lyric Suite etc Fleming, Emerson Qt Decca

Webern Lieder Oelze DG

Davies Revelation and Fall Thomas, Melos Ens
Warner Classics

Birtwistle Pulse Shadows Arditti Qt Teldec

Nono Fragmente-Stille, An Diotima LaSalle Qt DG

Reimann Lieder Banse, Cherubini Qt Tudor



Schoenberg's Quartet No 2 prompts our two journeys

In Quartet No 2, a soprano sings the poetry of Stefan George. Try the Brindisi Quartet's version with Christiane Oelze on Metronome.

Voice and small ensemble

Schoenberg wrote his Second Quartet at an emotionally turbulent time in his life, and the scoring of solo voice and four stringed instruments conveys remarkably high levels of intensity. Six years later, Respighi's Shelley setting, *Il tramonto* ('The sunset') links a mezzo to a string quartet to comparably powerful effect. (Fauré's arrangement of his cycle *La bonne chanson* for voice, piano and string quartet had explored similar textures, as does, with added winds, Peter Warlock's ravishing **The Curlew**.) Frank Martin's **Quatre sonnets à Cassandre** of 1921, employing the poetry of the 16th-century Ronsard, places the soprano alongside a viola, cello and (on this recording what sounds like a wooden) flute – it's a delicious sonic mix.

Samuel Barber's dark, brooding setting of Matthew Arnold, **Dover Beach**, uses a baritone with string quartet to portray the gradual decline of religious belief. Zemlinsky pupil and Mahler assistant Karl Weigl reveals, in **Five Songs**, a fine compositional voice and a highly sensitive skill at setting words. Geoffrey Bush's **Farewell Earth's Bliss** of 1950 sets words by a handful of Elizabethan and 17th-century poets and portrays the transience of life; like *Dover Beach*, the combination of baritone and string quartet is highly intoxicating and the lyrical and tonal language most appealing.

Shostakovich's 1967 **Blok** settings for soprano and piano trio have a sparseness and power perfectly matched to Alexander Blok's pessimist and death-drenched words. The richness of the piano trio works beautifully with the soprano voice (Galina Vishnevskaya's was the inspiration). In 1993, John Tavener set another Russian poet, **Anna Akhmatova** (he had already used her words for his *Akhmatova: Requiem* of 1979), but here the texture is just a solo soprano and solo cello. It's beautifully gauged here by Patricia Rozario, for whom Tavener wrote it. John Harbison's **The Rewaking** uses the voice as 'melisma' to set William Carlos Williams, poems that explore man's relationship to nature.

James Jolly

Respighi *Il tramonto* Kožená et al DG

Fauré *La bonne chanson* Belcea Qt Warner Classics

Warlock *The Curlew* Padmore et al Harmonia Mundi

Martin *Quatre sonnets* Mayer-Reinach et al Gallo

Barber *Dover Beach* Allen; Endellion Qt Erato

Weigl *Five songs* Klussmann et al Capriccio

Bush *Farewell Earth's Bliss* Varcoe Chandos

Shostakovich *Seven Blok Romances* Rodgers;
Beaux Arts Trio Decca

Tavener *Akhmatova Songs* Rozario; Isserlis RCA

Harbison *The Rewaking* Labelle; Lydian Qt Dorian



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REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Charles Munch: the Boston legacy

RCA revisits the complete recordings from Charles Munch's long and fruitful New England tenure

Charles Munch's tenure with the Boston Symphony (1949-62) witnessed the emergence of a supercharged and refined orchestral machine. Munch himself was the very epitome of unfettered spontaneity, ranging in musical style from imaginative reportage of French repertory to athletic Brahms and Schubert symphonies and a Beethoven Ninth that, in its cataclysmic effect, approaches – though doesn't quite match – the incendiary impact of Toscanini.

Born in Strasbourg in 1891, the son of an organist, Munch studied the violin with Carl Flesch and Lucien Capet before becoming Leader of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under both Bruno Walter and Wilhelm Furtwängler. Munch's Boston discography is sizeable and wide-ranging but this superbly produced set doesn't stop there. The action-packed first recordings – Saint-Saëns' Third Symphony, d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard* and Franck's *Symphonic Variations* (the latter two with pianist Robert Casadesus) – are with the New York Philharmonic Symphony and the set concludes with a programme of Ravel, Fauré and Berlioz featuring the Philadelphia Orchestra, performances full of flair and colour originally put out by CBS.

Repertory rarities include approachable symphonies by Easley Blackwood Jr (his First) and Alexei Haieff (his more concise Second), Honegger's Symphonies Nos 2 and 5, the Sixth Symphonies of Piston and Martinů, Menotti's Violin Concerto (with Tossy Spivakovsky) and works that were little known when Munch made his first recordings of them, Berlioz's dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, for example, which he went on to re-record towards the close of his time with the orchestra. One of the fascinating processes afforded by the set is the chance to make comparisons between

first and second recorded versions, *Roméo* being a prime example, the first being the more viscerally assertive, the second, weighted, relatively mellow, and full of barely veiled anguish, as if viewed from the knowing standpoint of Friar Laurence. Speaking personally I'd opt for the stereo re-make but am very happy to have both while Munch's brilliant and audacious way with *Harold in Italy* (with viola player William Primrose), the Requiem, *The Damnation of Faust*, *Les Nuits d'été* (with the wonderful Victoria de los Angeles), *L'Enfance du Christ*, and various shorter orchestral works is consistently compelling. Other Berlioz comparisons include the *Symphonie fantastique*, where parallel observations apply while the two versions of Brahms's Fourth offer a contrast between driving passion in top gear and big-hearted exuberance, the later stereo version being both better played and more poised. Schumann No 1, too, finds us witnessing two takes on the one combustible interpreter, the first more hot-headed than the second.

Then there are the soloists, including the orchestra's section leaders (and pianist Lukas Foss) in a sanely urbane set of Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*. RCA's stellar roster of violinists from the 1950s facilitated three wonderful versions of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, Jascha Heifetz under Reiner and two conducted by Munch, Nathan Milstein in 1953 and Henryk Szeryng in 1959. Heifetz's presence in this set rests on the glories of three extremely famous recordings. The Beethoven concerto marries precision to sweetness and serenity, Mendelssohn's concerto (quite different to Munch's later version with Jaime Laredo or Heifetz's earlier recording under Beecham), although similarly heart-rending in places, will perhaps prove just a little too hard-driven for some and there's Prokofiev's

Second Concerto, acerbic, witty, bittersweet and in the second movement more poignantly expressive than any other version on disc, silver or otherwise. Also worthy of note is Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto with Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer, remarkable not only for the powerful solo playing but for the sheer heft of Munch's conducting. There's also David Oistrakh in Chausson's *Poème* and Yehudi Menuhin in the Bruch First Concerto. Cellist Gregor Piatigorsky plays Bloch's *Schelomo* and Walton's Cello Concerto and contributes to what must surely be one of the most touching and dramatic accounts of Strauss's *Don Quixote* ever recorded. There's so much more of course. And my personal favourites? Certainly the Strauss, Chausson's B flat Symphony, Debussy's *Printemps*, Rachmaninov's Third Concerto with Byron Janis and Beethoven's First Concerto with Richter, Stravinsky's *Jeu de cartes*, Tchaikovsky's Serenade and Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*.

The 86 CDs (selling for about £150) come housed in a heavy, solidly built oblong box, the discs themselves slipped into miniature card reproductions of their original LP sleeves (the relatively short playing durations are intact too, at least for the most part) while the 162-page hardback booklet offers detailed information about recording dates and locations, release information and various related issues. It's a superb production and has already given me hours of musical pleasure. The tape-disc transfers are mostly excellent.

THE RECORDINGS



Charles Munch - The Complete RCA Album Collection
Boston Symphony Orchestra / Charles Munch
RCA Red Seal © (86 discs)

8887 516979-2



Charles Munch's stewardship with the Boston Symphony witnessed playing of style and power

Maverick maestro

If Munch tended to ease the pace as he got older, the German conductor **Hermann Scherchen** (1891-1966), like Toscanini, tended to speed up. A 27-CD set on Scribendum devoted to Scherchen recordings from the 1950s includes a complete Beethoven cycle shared between the Royal Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera orchestras. Interestingly, rather than opt for the stereo versions of the *Eroica* and *Pastoral* Symphonies (both made in Vienna), Scribendum includes their broader mono counterparts. If I tell you that the mono *Eroica* first movement clocks up 14'44" and the stereo version 14'39" you may be forgiven for suspecting that there isn't much in it, that is until I reveal that the later alternative includes the long first-movement exposition repeat (which the earlier one doesn't). That will give you some idea of the contrasts in tempo: it's as if Scherchen has suddenly morphed from Otto Klemperer into Sir John Eliot Gardiner. Ever the rostrum provocateur, Scherchen offers numerous interesting interpretations, an early Brahms First being flexible and passionate to a fault, his uncut version of Glière's *Ilya Muromets* Symphony – here spread over two discs whereas Westminster accommodate it on one – is charged with atmosphere. I also enjoyed Scherchen's Vienna Tchaikovsky Fourth, in spite of some alarming shifts in

tempo and a number of audible edits: the level of commitment and the intensity of the playing will sear the performance into your musical memory. Scherchen's later, stereo recordings of Bach's B minor Mass and Mozart's Requiem are included, both productions graced by fine soloists, with Bach's opening 'Kyrie' broader even than Klemperer's already marmoreal account.

The four Bach Orchestral Suites with the English Baroque Orchestra feature an unpredictably wide array of tempos. As to Haydn, we're given stereo versions of the *Military* and *Farewell* Symphonies, the latter closing with a long series of audible 'Lebwohls' as members of the orchestra take their leave. Mahler is represented by dedicated accounts of Symphonies Nos 1, 2, 5, 7 and 10 (*Adagio*), and there's much, much more besides. Of the four orchestras featured (VSO, Vienna State Opera Orchestra, RPO, EBO), the London bands are perhaps the best drilled, but I wouldn't in any case advise listening for the finer details. Scherchen opted for the wider perspective, which is what gave his performances their highly original slant. Listening to this set is at the very least something of an education.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Hermann Scherchen

Scribendum © (27 discs)
SC801

Revisiting the Baryllis

Continuing its series of generously packed chamber-music boxes Scribendum now turns its attention to the Austrian Barylli Quartet, initially brought together during the Second World War by the violinist Walter Barylli (b1921), Leader of the Vienna Philharmonic. Re-formed in 1945, the Quartet made many recordings for the Westminster label including the complete Beethoven cycle featured here. Performance-wise, most memorable is the group's arched phrasing and propensity for singing lines. Included alongside the Beethoven quartets are a number of Mozart quartets (many of them early) and quintets. At first I was happy to see the inclusion of K515's long exposition repeat – especially as the performance itself wears a happy countenance – but come the end of the exposition at 4'31" there's a whopping great edit which would suggest the repeat was added later. A first glance at the Quintet K46 suggested another early work except that all four movements replicate music from the *Gran Partita* for winds. The same disc finds the Quartet significantly augmented for a performance of the *Posthorn* Serenade.

The set's voluminous contents include works with piano by Janáček, Franz Schmidt, Schumann (the Piano Quartet and Quintet credited in reverse order on the sleeve), Schubert and the three Brahms piano quartets with the excellent Jörg Demus. But there's a maddening hitch with the Beethoven quartet cycle. Put on Op 59 No 1 and come the end of *Adagio*, just before the start of the 'Russian' theme, the bridge from tracks 3 to 4 involves a silent break right in the middle of the linking violin trill. This sort of thing happens a number of times, not exactly what you need in Middle and Late Beethoven quartets. Interestingly the First *Razumovsky* leads to the sunny opening of the String Quintet, Op 29, which illustrates how, to my mind, the Barylli is best suited to the genial aspects of Beethoven's temperament rather than the more confrontational later works where they're just a little bland. Edits and gaps aside, the transfers are excellent and viewed as a whole the Barylli Quartet's many virtues are handsomely celebrated. ⑥

THE RECORDING



The Art of the Barylli Quartet

Scribendum © (22 discs)
SC805

Books



Lindsay Kemp reads Peter Williams's crowning biography of JS Bach:

'His forensically researched and ingeniously practical considerations are many and various, with many a tangent taken along the way'



Mark Pullinger reviews a pocket guide to bel canto's greatest opera:

'This guide gives the reader a good idea why Bellini's Norma holds such a hallowed place in the repertoire'

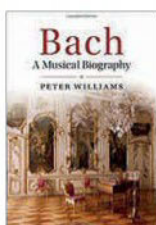
Bach

A Musical Biography

By Peter Williams

Cambridge University Press, HB, 718pp, £29.99

ISBN 978-1-107-13925-1



One of the most powerful images we have of Bach today is of the eternally curious intellect

meticulously seeking out every compositional implication in a piece of music, never quite leaving it alone, always prepared to explore its possibilities further than others can. As a Bach biographer, Peter Williams, who died last March, was perhaps no less assiduous in his comprehensive searching for truth, whether about the music or the man, as the 718 pages of his last book reveal. Indeed, *Bach: A Musical Biography* looks like an example of his own inability to let things lie: it is by his own admission an enlargement of his earlier *JS Bach: A Life in Music* (CUP: 2007, 405pp), which in turn was a fuller version of *The Life of Bach* (CUP: 2004, 219pp). How many stones can still be lying unturned?

With a subject like Bach, the answer is probably very many. The lack of anecdotal evidence for his character is great enough to make any would-be analyst nervous, while the strongly supportable suspicion that large areas of his musical output (for instance perhaps as many as 100 church cantatas) are forever lost, complicated by the composer's professional habit of reworking earlier pieces, undermines attempts to formulate notions of development and chronology. Many who have written on Bach have been content to use what there is and construct for themselves a Bach they like, based on a mixture of awe and emotion. No one could suspect Williams of failing to admire his subject, yet the man who first suggested that the D minor Toccata and Fugue might not originally have been a toccata and fugue, or for organ, or by Bach, is certainly

not afraid to question not only the meaning and motives of any and every observation offered by Bach's contemporaries, but seemingly also any and every thought of his own. Reviewing *The Life of Bach*, Williams's one-time teacher Gustav Leonhardt described him as 'a master of putting question marks where they belong', and as ever the great harpsichordist put his finger right on the mark. Rarely can a book have peppered so much authoritative knowledge and wisdom with as many ifs, ors, maybes, possibly and unlikelys.

Mind you, like its predecessors, this book hangs its narrative on the obituary of Bach jointly published in 1754 by the composer's son Carl Philipp Emanuel and pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola, and takes up its nuanced inclusions and its omissions (much on Bach's concert organ-playing and grander job titles for example; next to nothing on his long years providing music for Leipzig's churches) as a springboard for minute speculation. The title of the second section of the book – 'What was said, what can be inferred' – could indeed stand for the approach as a whole, and the remarkable thing is that so much hedging fascinates much more than it irritates, and that a view of Bach that is Williams's own emerges from it so strongly.

That view gives us, among other things, a Bach both obsessed with the idea of building compilations that systematically explore every stylistic or compositional aspect of a musical genre (the four books of *Clavierübung*), and capable of losing energy or even interest in them (*Orgelbüchlein*); a composer who, while inextricably grounded in an 'older' style, was more interested in modern *galant* music emanating from the Dresden court than often given credit for; an organist and harpsichordist for whom, modern-day enthusiasm of his cantata output notwithstanding, the keyboard was above all where 'he could be said to be most alone with his thoughts about music'; a musical professional constantly on sharp-eyed lookout for a better job, though not necessarily with money as his main motive; and a

patriarch who cared for family and pupils (there are some humane observations on the relationship with his talented but possibly overwhelmed eldest son Wilhelm Friedemann). Williams even dares to propose Bach as a composer for whom completism could, just on occasion, lead to worthiness.

Having said that, the reader must be prepared to put in the hours to find these things. The going is not always easy, and the mixture of forensically researched and ingeniously practical considerations on which Williams bases his speculations are many and various, with many a tangent taken along the way. No doubt it is inevitable that a mind so crammed with Bachian detail should wander off the point from time to time, but the sheer accumulation of meticulously considered observations eventually makes its mark, leaving one in renewed wonder at this astonishing composer's compulsive intellectual drive, rumbling life-force and superhuman ability to move listeners with the sheer power of organised musical notes.

Lindsay Kemp

Norma

Overture Opera Guides (series editor Gary Kahn)

Alma Classics, PB, 256pp, £12.00

ISBN 978-1-847-49594-5



Ask any enthusiast to name the definitive *bel canto* opera and Bellini's *Norma* will be the likeliest response. It's

certainly timely that *Norma* is the latest title in the Overture Opera Guides series, produced in association with English National Opera. This year has seen several new productions, including those at Naples' Teatro San Carlo, The Royal Opera (from which Anna Netrebko stepped down just weeks after it was officially announced) and at ENO itself (Christopher Alden's production borrowed from Opera North). That Alden's production is mentioned in



Marjorie Owens, Peter Auty and the ENO Chorus, in ENO's 2016 production of *Norma*

the performance history chapter is testament to how commendably up to date this volume was when published. With significant new productions ahead in places like the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2017, it's an opera that continues to fascinate.

This guide gives the reader a good idea why *Norma* holds such a hallowed place in the repertoire. Four authors each take a chapter exploring different aspects of the opera's history before a brief thematic guide is followed by a full Italian libretto and Kenneth Chalmers's English translation.

Just as any soprano (or mezzo) taking on the title-role must confront the ghost of Maria Callas, so any history of the opera must take account of the role's creator, Giuditta Pasta. Susan Rutherford provides the historical background to the opera and its genesis, including descriptions of Pasta's voice and technique and the extent to which she influenced Bellini's vocal writing for *Norma*. Gary Kahn's brief guide to Bellini's and *Norma*'s admirers adds historical context.

Having prepared a BBC Radio 3 *Building a Library* on the opera a year ago, Roger Parker provides a scene-by-scene musical analysis of the score. *Norma*'s aria 'Casta diva' correctly earns plenty of attention, focusing on Bellini's setting of repeated words and how he stretches syllables. Parker also briefly deals with vocal roles, addressing the current debate about *Norma* and *Adalgisa*. Without naming names, he casts doubts about the 'dubious authenticity' surrounding recent writing about Pasta's *Norma*, but also argues that *Adalgisa* is a soprano role. Although *Adalgisa* tends to sing the lower line in duet, both roles extend to a high C and – importantly – 'Adalgisa needs to sound younger than *Norma*, something that few mezzos will be able to manage'. Being uncharitable, I suppose it depends on how young your *Norma* sounds! In his fascinating chapter on the opera's performance history, John Allison recounts Max Loppert's astonished reaction on hearing Mariella Devia assume the title-

role for the first time the day after her 65th birthday: 'Her artistry has become indistinguishable from the unfolding of the music and the drama.'

Allison's 'Selective Performance History' is easily the most engagingly written chapter of the four, describing the various singers who have essayed the four main roles along with accounts of developments in production styles. The latter section is liberally scattered with amusing *bons mots* from the likes of Rodney Milnes and Hugh Canning in their *Opera* magazine reviews. Allison also addresses changes in performance practices, from Riccardo Muti to Cecilia Bartoli, whose controversial assumption of the title-role – so associated with Maria Callas – he describes as 'marching straight into the tigress's den'.

There's a useful discography listing *Norma* on disc and on DVD, but perhaps expanding this to a chapter – or adding annotations about the key recordings – could help guide the newcomer to where to explore next. **Mark Pullinger**

Classics RECONSIDERED



Caroline Gill and **Edward Breen** discuss the merits of The Tallis Scholars' Gramophone Award-winning recording of Josquin's *Missa Pange lingua*



Josquin Desprez

Missa Pange lingua

The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips

Gimell ® © CDGIM009. From CDGIM206

This is absolutely superb. You need only compare the new performance of the *Mass Pange lingua* with the Ensemble Clément Janequin LP (Harmonia Mundi) on which I heaped such superlatives last November to see how the eight singers of The Tallis Scholars are better in virtually all respects. The details are cleaner, the rhythms are more elegantly taken, the musical text they use is better (following, I think, mainly the early Vatican manuscript, CS16, whereas the French group basically seem to follow

a slightly garbled German print of 1539), and the broad unfolding of the musical rhetoric is beautifully controlled by Peter Phillips. We must accept, of course, that Josquin is unlikely to have heard this music with two ladies on the top line, but they do it so well that only a fundamentalist would mark the record down for that. It should also be said that the least successful performance on the entire disc is in the opening *Kyrie* of this Mass where there is a certain 'brutality in the approach; and although The Tallis Scholars make more of the 'Benedictus' and the last *Agnus Dei* than the French singers, there may still be better ways of doing it. On the other

hand, as just one example among many, these seem to be the first musicians to make the 'Osanna' truly successful and understand why Josquin should have chosen to compose it that way.

Until now The Tallis Scholars have concentrated on somewhat later music. I very much hope that they will devote more of their future energies to this earlier repertory to which they seem so well suited. Over the past 12 months there has been a surprising resurgence of interest in Josquin's music, constituting something of an *annus mirabilis* in his career on record: this seems much the best so far.

David Fallows (3/87)

Edward Breen I first heard this recording on a chrome cassette (remember them?) that I bought from a cathedral gift shop when I was about 12 years old. At that time I had no particular idea who Josquin was, but as a choirboy I'd noticed that my favourite music was in *The Oxford Book of Tudor Anthems*, and so I was mistakenly drawn to this recording by the name Tallis rather than anything else. Thankfully, I loved it and soon wore the tape out by repeatedly winding back and forth to rehear the 'Pleni sunt caeli' duet (much to the relief of my parents, who by default listened to Bob Dylan in the car). Considering how little unaccompanied Renaissance polyphony had lodged in the public subconscious at that time, I wonder how many others discovered Josquin or even just the sound of professional early music vocalists through this groundbreaking *Gramophone* Award winner?

Caroline Gill I'm sure that winning Record of the Year in 1987 raised its profile, and I remember thinking at the time that it was

an incredibly radical choice. I was in my early teens when it was first released and, faced with the same choice of format you would have had, I plumped for LP rather than cassette. I still have that record. When I rationalised my collection many years ago, I sold most of my vinyl in order to replace it with CD to future-proof my listening, but I kept the *Missa Pange lingua* (along with David Hill's recording of the Victoria Requiem with Westminster Cathedral Choir) because it represented the start of my relationship with polyphony.

It was the first time I had heard chant sung with clear (but subtle) phrasing, and that brought out the pure and absolute beauty of its melodies for me in a way that was like discovering my house had a beautiful extra room that I'd known nothing about. Funnily enough, though, when I listen to this recording now I notice the imperfections in some of the tuning that I'm not sure would get past producers today – such have standards for absolute perfection in tuning and blend become

part of the identity of performance of polyphony over the past 30 years (though I think it could probably have slipped an awful lot further if its only comparator for perfect tuning was Bob Dylan!). I think that what we expect to hear now in performances of this repertoire is in great part to do with the example The Tallis Scholars set back then. And although we can hear that the sound has evolved and refined itself, it has fundamentally barely changed, despite its (albeit slow) turnover of singers: what you hear now still contains that legacy of the sound of the Clerkes of Oxenford.

EB I'm fascinated to hear that you thought this album was a 'radical choice' for Record of the Year in 1987 because I think I can also detect a note of the trail-blazing radical in David Fallows's review: 'This is absolutely superb' is the sort of opening line that a reviewer might only use once in a lifetime, and it is clear to me now that he had immediately grasped the importance of this release. It's true that Phillips based his



The winning Tallis Scholars team with their Gramophone Award (engineer Mike Clements, back row left, and co-producer Steve Smith, front row left)

sound on the soaring clarity of David Wulstan's performances with The Clerkes of Oxenford, something he readily admits in the second edition of his book *What We Really Do: The Tallis Scholars* (2013). However, I detect a small but essential shift from the naive, ethereal sound that Wulstan sought to the cool confidence that Phillips and his singers developed which, as you rightly say, comes right at the very beginning of these Josquin Masses with the clear phrasing of the plain song.

Revisiting this disc after what must be a decade or so I am also struck by how little the sound of The Tallis Scholars has dated, and I find myself reflecting that Phillips and his extraordinarily talented singers had found an ur-performance style, one that is vocal without being choral or, more importantly, self-consciously singerly. By avoiding ostentatiously interpretative gestures they future-proofed themselves against the shifting tides of musical fashion. But more than that, there's something in their approach to phrasing which defines their distinctive sound.

CG I think it *was* a trail-blazing choice, yes – early music was given so much less credence then than it is now, and the *Gramophone* Award was, I think (although I may be biased!), a visionary choice. The canon of post-Renaissance music was very rarely given any pre-Bachian context, and the pure sound of the voices and technical requirements of any instrumental works were often written off as second-rate in comparison with the generally more virtuosic complexion of music written in and after the Baroque period.

So I agree absolutely that there was a steeliness in the purity of sound that The Tallis Scholars cultivated, which was totally new despite what I am sure was a conscious intention to emulate certain elements of the sound of The Clerkes. It brought to this repertoire a confidence and lack of apology that I think changed the direction of what we would now describe as 'historically informed performance' – although, equally, I'm not sure that their sound has actually changed with it. I think they try to create exactly the same sound now that they did

then, but in simply doing that they have created an identity that is entirely distinctive. The Renaissance repertoire is enormous, and they have worked their way through it over the course of 40 or so years, maintaining a sort of consistency that has been extremely helpful to the way that listeners perceive that repertoire as well as in terms of the extent to which this music has reached new enthusiasts. So I wonder if rather than saying that the sound of The Tallis Scholars hasn't dated, it's actually more of a question of it having stayed consciously the same in the face of those shifting tides of musical fashion. In which case, where does that leave this first properly high-profile disc of theirs, the *Missa Pange lingua*? I think for me it represents more than just the fact that it was the first insight into a repertoire that has probably contained more musical revelations over the past half-century than any other, or the first proper peek above the parapet for a group that is (still) unique. For me, there was a whole musical landscape waiting to be discovered at the point that this disc was released, and The Tallis Scholars came along and resolutely stuck their flag in it.

EB I couldn't agree more! This recording remains impressive not just because of its brilliant interpretation and beautiful sound, but also because of the coherence of those ideas; a formula that has remained valuable and rewarding to the present day. Considering how much has changed in early music, and how many more people perform and record it these days, that's no mean feat.

The original *Gramophone* review has also weathered well. The no-frills, matter-of-fact confidence with which DF began reflected the no-frills, matter-of-fact confidence of The Tallis Scholars' performance. The clean details, elegant rhythms, and broad unfolding that he highlighted is striking, since here amid their 1980s recordings he has pinpointed those very qualities that became the quintessential sound of The Tallis Scholars. It was, and still is, that particular click between Phillips's unfussy approach and the clear lines of Josquin's music that makes this disc so bewitching. So much so that I wonder why Phillips chose Tallis as his ensemble's namesake? In the 1980s I feel Andrew Parrott was leading the pack with Tallis, but when it came to Josquin Phillips was absolutely spot on.

Did you know that there is an unreleased 1978 recording of *Missa de la batalla escoutez* by Guerrero? Speaking of the early sound of this group, that would be fascinating to hear. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Psalms and music

The contents of the biblical Book of Psalms have been treated in various ways down the centuries, and the traditions are still evolving. **Andrew Mellor** explores both chant-based renditions and composed settings

When we speak of psalms – that's to say, sacred theocentric poems of ancient origin, generally consisting of short, bifurcated units – we generally refer to the 150 texts often known collectively as the Psalms of David. These Hebrew scriptures, which form the cornerstone of literary Judaism and Christianity, heave with music: there are copious references to song, singing and the plucking, scraping, hitting and blowing of instruments in praise of God.

The recitation of the Psalms to music has a gargantuan history. In the Levitical Temple they were most likely sung by both single and massed voices to heterophonic instrumental accompaniments. The Acts of

Paul refers to unspecific psalm singing in the late second century; Tertullian and Hippolytus refer to solo, choral and responsorial psalm singing at the turn of the third century.

But the Psalms only began to take a central musical place in Christian worship in the fourth century. Later, texts were plucked out to form the backbone of monastic offices (Gregorian chant took on its distinctive inflections partly as a response to the shape of the texts) and majorly infiltrated the liturgy of the Byzantine Church, too.

The Gregorian psalm tones themselves steered the earliest 'composed' polyphonic settings, anchoring the musical discourse as *cantus firmi*. Polyphony in the Low

Countries and elsewhere broke free by degrees, but still cleaved to the poetry, imagery and devotion of the Psalm texts. Centuries of composition followed, with composers from Handel to Bernstein and beyond creating elaborate settings that unleashed all the imagery (and sometimes savagery) inherent in the poems.

But the recitation of the Psalms by means of chanting exists to this day, adhering to hundreds of separate but still-evolving traditions. For all the masterpieces of 'composed' music that the Psalms (here numbered according to the Hebrew sequence) have produced, perhaps it's these chant traditions that tell us most about the strident poetry inherent within them. **G**



David (who purportedly wrote some, if not all, the Psalms) plays the harp to dispel Saul's evil spirits in this biblical scene. The Greek term 'psalmós' means 'song sung to a harp'

PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC AND ARTS PHOTO LIBRARY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

**Lewandowski**

Psalm 92: It is a good thing...
 Estrongo Nachama *cantor*
 Siegen Philharmonic Choir /
 Herbert Ermer
 Koch

The chanting of the Psalms and other sacred Hebrew texts can vary wildly in style and forces from synagogue to synagogue; few commercial recordings exist and those that do (and this one is pretty rare) are far from representative. This collection offers a glimpse of one particularly strong tradition, with a scattering of Psalms that includes a full Hebrew rendition of Psalm 92, titled *Mismor schir l'jom Haschabat*.

**Plainchant**

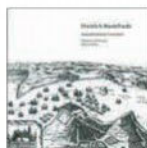
Psalm 122: Laetatus sum
 Cistercian Monks of Stift
 Heiligenkreuz
 DG

Here is monastic singing in its purest but most broadly representational form from the well-tuned, clean-voiced monks of the Cistercian Monastery of the Holy Cross, in the heart of the Vienna woods. Their recording opens with the *In paradisum* antiphon, which segues into Psalm 122 - famously set by Parry as *I was glad* but rather less imposing here, sung on the seventh tone (as given in the *Graduale romanum*).

**Monteverdi**

Psalm 127: Nisi Dominus
 L'Arpeggiata /
 Christina Pluhar *theo*
 Virgin Classics (5/11)

Christians saw the huge potential of the Psalms when constructing their church's 'offices' of Matins, Vespers, Compline and so forth - which eventually were built around prescribed Psalms. Monteverdi's *Vespers* of 1610 contains five. The music fascinatingly reflects the antiphonal/responsive chanting traditions with then-fashionable *chori spezzati* techniques, but each - including the capering *Nisi Dominus* - embeds the Gregorian psalm tone as a cantus firmus.

**Buxtehude**

Psalm 134: Ecce nunc benedicite Domino
 Theatre of Voices / Paul Hillier
 Dacapo (3/11)

Buxtehude was one of the most important and prolific setters of Psalm texts during the 17th century, composing Psalm-based motets to be sung in Latin, German, Swedish and Danish. Psalm 134 is a joyous celebration of the deity - 'lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and praise the Lord'; but while Buxtehude adds supplementary alleluias at the end, he casts his setting for low voices in a touching act of Scandinavian restraint.

**Handel**

Psalm 110: Dixit Dominus
 Soloists; Vocalconsort Berlin;
 Akademie für Alte Music
 Berlin / Marcus Creed
 Harmonia Mundi (11/09)

In no piece of Baroque music is the cantus firmus of a plainsong psalm tone more obviously or joyously tossed up by the music's churn than in Handel's *Dixit Dominus*. This Psalm of assurance has been 'set' possibly more than any other, given its prominence in the office of Vespers. There is theological conviction in every bar of Handel's treatment of the text, and the perfect balance of care and communication in this performance.

**Gibbons**

Behold, thou hast made my days (from Psalm 39)
 Red Byrd, Rose Consort of Viols
 Naxos

In their distinctive and unspeakably beautiful 16th-century English translation attributed to Myles Coverdale (still used by the Church of England today), the Psalms proved a rich literary resource for the declamatory verse anthem when it was popular. Gibbons's response to selected verses from Psalm 39 is extraordinarily honest and imaginative, as is Red Byrd's very particular 'historical' rendering of those words on this unparalleled recording.

**Ives**

Psalm 90: Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place
 Soloists, SWR Vocal Ensemble
 / Marcus Creed
 Hänssler Classic (3/09)

Ives's 10 Psalm settings represent the composer at his visionary, iconoclastic best, but with the church (and organ bench) of his youth foregrounded. Never does Ives shy away from the propulsive spite and violence of some verses (not least in his setting of Psalm 90), and he is similarly aware of theological undercurrents (even when he appears to poke mild fun at them) and the poetry's endearing pattern of repetitions.

**Penderecki**

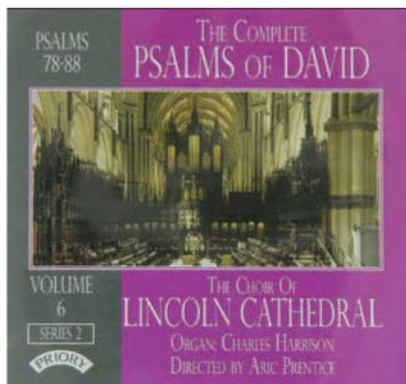
Psalms of David
 Polish Chamber Choir,
 Cracow Philharmonic Soloists
 / Jan Łukaszewski
 Dux (9/14)

Each movement in Krzysztof Penderecki's first choral piece (1958) uses verses from a Psalm (28, 30, 43 and 143 respectively) in a 1500s Polish translation. Like Ives, he doesn't shy away from the desperation of the psalmist, evident in his use of confrontational double choir, percussion and four string basses as much as in the music's expressionist gait. Penderecki, though, speaks with steady faith and all its underlying assurance.

**Bernstein**

Chichester Psalms
 Solo treble; Vienna Youth
 Choir; Israel Philharmonic
 Orchestra / Leonard Bernstein
 DG (9/78)

Although commissioned by an English cathedral, Bernstein's settings of portions of Psalms 23, 100, 108, 131 and 133 are the only such examples in Hebrew to have entered the international repertoire. With his huge imagination and gift for the conveyance of dancing, grooving 20th-century joy, that's hardly a surprise (especially in the case of Psalm 108's text with all its musical high jinks). Not so much a devotional piece as a masterpiece.



Beard, Bennett, Elvey, Howells, Ousely, Reid

Psalm 78: Hear my law, o my people
 Lincoln Cathedral Choir / Aric Prentice *Priory*

Psalm 78 is one of the longest and most outspoken of the poems but also one of the most overtly narrative. It has everything: lice, frogs, caterpillars, grasshoppers, feathered fowls, 'wonders in the field of Zoan' and 'marvellous things in the land of Egypt'. The use of assorted composed Anglican chants (templates of 20 - generally - looping chords

established in the 18th century that allow for recitation at something like speech rhythm), in this case by no fewer than six composers, renders every word audible and locks in to the bifurcated patterns of the poems themselves. The singing of Psalms to these chants is a priceless, idiosyncratic, stunningly beautiful and living tradition.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil*

This challenging 15-movement a cappella work, fully performable within an Orthodox liturgical context, has a patchy early recorded history, but today, finds **Ivan Moody**, Russian choirs have some serious competition

Rachmaninov's unaccompanied choral work *All-Night Vigil* (the 'Vespers' label arises from a misunderstanding: it is a setting of parts of Vespers and Matins according to the Byzantine rite, together forming a 'vigil') has now become firmly entrenched in the repertoire of Western choirs, but this was not always the case, as shown by the early discography.

The work was completed in February 1915, in a mere two weeks, while the composer was in the middle of a concert tour of Russia with Koussevitzky. It was not Rachmaninov's first foray into church music – there is a 'choral concerto', *V molitvakh neuspayushchuyu Bogoroditsu* ('The Mother of God, Ever Vigilant in Prayer'), dating from 1893, and a setting of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom from 1910 – but it is universally recognised that the *Vigil* constitutes the culmination of what musicologist Marina Frolova-Walker has called the 'New Trend' in Russian sacred choral music. There are other works of similar stature, such as Grechaninov's *Passion Week* (1911–12) and the recently rediscovered work of the same name by Maximilian Steinberg (1921–23), both concert works in spite of the use of chant; but Rachmaninov's work has a very particular place in the history of Russian music, because it is, though technically very challenging, and though its first performance was in concert, a composition that is fully performable within a liturgical context.

GENESIS

The *All-Night Vigil* is dedicated to the memory of Stepan Vasil'yevich Smolensky (1849–1909), who had been responsible for introducing the composer to the history

and techniques of Russian sacred music at the Moscow Conservatoire. Rachmaninov's great achievement in the work is to reconcile his remarkable gift for choral writing (the term 'choral orchestration' has been used to describe his mastery of choral colour, achieved through intricate texturing, extensive use of *divisi* and precisely notated articulations and dynamics) with the history and culture of the Russian Orthodox Church by means of the use of chant melodies of various kinds (Znamenny, Kievan and Greek); these melodies permeate the work so that even freely composed sections are imbued with the style of chant – what Rachmaninov himself described as 'a conscious counterfeit of the ritual'.

The first performance (March 10, 1915) was such a success that the piece was repeated a further four times during the concert season. It was given by the Moscow Synodal Choir under Nikolay Danilin, who famously exclaimed, on seeing the low B flats at the end of the 'Nyne otpushchayeshi' (*Nunc dimittis*), 'Where am I to find basses like this? It is as difficult as finding asparagus at Christmas' – a comment reflecting the difficulty of finding singers at a time when Russia was embroiled in the First World War.

EARLY RECORDINGS

Subsequent performance history was patchy, to say the least, until about 1955–57, during the Khrushchev thaw, when it began to be sung again (paradoxically) in its liturgical context, Nikolay Matveyev instituting annual performances at the Transfiguration Church in Moscow.



The work's early recorded history is also quite patchy, beginning in 1965 with the State Academic Choir of the USSR under the brilliant conductor **Alexander Sveshnikov**. He had been a member of the Synodal Choir, and was aged 24 at the time of the *Vigil's* first performance, being therefore a genuine link to the pre-revolutionary tradition. Much of the style of his recording, however, might seem the polar opposite of the tremendous subtlety for which the Synodal Choir was renowned: little about



Alexander Sveshnikov presides over a concert by the State Academic Choir of the USSR in 1970, five years after the same forces made the first recording of Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil*

the choral timbre is refined or homogeneous. Rather, it is a brilliant firework of a performance, with huge dynamic contrasts, tremendous exploitation of the bass octavists and much over-accenting and scooping at the beginnings of phrases. All that said, it never fails to impress; one of its great strengths is Sveshnikov's long-range thinking, a deep understanding of the music's phrasing and structure.

Bulgarian choirs have long featured Russian music in their repertoire, and it is

thus no surprise that an ensemble of the stature of the Svetoslav Obretenov Bulgarian A Cappella Choir (also known as the Bulgarian National Choir) conducted by **Georgi Robev** should have chosen to record the Rachmaninov in 1978 (this is their only recording of the piece – there is no later, 1994, recording as is suggested elsewhere). In spite of the massively resonant acoustics, the choir, as John Warrack noted (4/87), 'sing the work in a rather lighter, more fluent manner' than Russian choirs tend to. This has its

advantages, however, and the recording remains an impressive contribution to the discography.

It was not until the 1980s that another worthy recording of the *Vigil* was made – by the Choral Arts Society of Washington under **Mstislav Rostropovich**. It created a precedent for an abiding interest in the work on the part of American choirs. The most immediately noticeable contrast with Sveshnikov's recording is the brightness of the tone, and there are a few moments of questionable



Rachmaninov in c1910, five years before he wrote the *All-Night Vigil* during a concert tour of Russia

intonation and balance; in addition, contralto soloist Maureen Forrester's tone may be an acquired taste, but it is nevertheless fine overall. Very daring is the extremely slow pace of the 'Bogoroditse devo' ('Virgin Mother of God') – most choirs would fall apart at this speed, but Rostropovich maintains the tension in a remarkable way.

The **Valery Polyansky** recording reconciles a precision of tuning and pacing with the passion of the Russian tradition in an outstandingly beautiful rendition. He knows exactly how to pace the work, giving exactly the right amount of time for the choir to breathe between phrases but never seeming too leisurely, and he clearly possesses that all-important understanding of the shape and function of the piece as a whole. If the accents of 'Bogoroditse devo' are ancestors of Sveshnikov's technique, the superb choral balance is in another category

entirely – 'Blagosloven yesi, Gospodi' ('Blessed Art Thou, O Lord') is probably the finest on disc, and throughout there is a magical blending of the depth of the lower voices with a lustrous sheen in the altos and sopranos that remains unequalled.

Robert Shaw's recording (1989) is quite a different animal. The Robert Shaw Festival Singers' trademark ethereal smoothness is present everywhere, which puts this at the opposite pole from Sveshnikov – and perhaps that is the limitation of this unarguably beautiful rendition; there seems to be more investment in the beauty of the sound for its own sake than anything else. One would like a little more contrast, and more of a sensation that the music is not just a choral suite of lovely movements.

EXPANSION

The recording by the Corydon Singers under **Matthew Best**, dating from one year

later (and with which, in the interests of full disclosure, I was involved as musicological adviser), offers yet another approach. While the choir does not sound exactly Russian, making the best of experienced singers trained in the English choral tradition, neither does it suffer from the exaggerated smoothness of Shaw's version, and, in addition, soloists Joya Logan (alto) and John Bowen (tenor) are outstanding. The approach is at times a little foursquare, the 'Bogoroditse devo' being an example, but the faster movements such as 'Blagosloven yesi, Gospodi' are, on the other hand, highly impressive and fleet of foot. This was not, incidentally, the first recording of the work by a British group, the Scottish Philharmonic Singers under Ian McCrorie having recorded it in 1982 (Abbey, 4/83 – nla); but it was the first recording of the 1990s. Thereafter the initiative became international, three of the decade's remaining versions being Russian, two British, one American and one Swedish. That by the virtuoso Voronezh Chamber Choir under **Oleg Shepel** (1991) ought to have marked a return to the full-blooded Russian tradition, but in fact it is very mannered, copying the extremes of Sveshnikov without the same deep understanding of the music. Speeds are also often unsettlingly fast.

With **Vladislav Chernushenko's** St Petersburg Cappella recording from 1992 (there is an earlier recording from 1989 on Olympia – 12/89 – which I have not been able to track down), things are quite different. There is a dark, creamy richness to the choral timbre, and outstanding basses; and, more importantly, the listener senses immediately that the conductor has the measure of the work, of what it is about, in precisely the way that Shepel does not. There is no flashiness for its own sake. Everything is unhurried and calculated to be an integral part of the whole, and the inclusion of a number of clergy exclamations reinforces this.

Nikolai Korniev's 1993 recording with the equally fine St Petersburg Chamber Choir, is more clearly recorded, but it is more

BEST HISTORICAL CHOICE

State Academic Choir USSR / Sveshnikov

Melodiya © MELCD100 1365

The classic reading, from a time when such could not have been anticipated. Sveshnikov



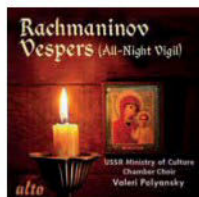
inherited the Moscow Synodal Choir tradition, and though his version doesn't correspond with what one might expect from such a lineage, it is indispensable.

BEST RUSSIAN CHOICE

USSR Ministry of Culture Chamber Choir / Polyansky

Alto © ALC1315

Russian versions imitate Sveshnikov at their peril, but Polyansky is his own man, achieving



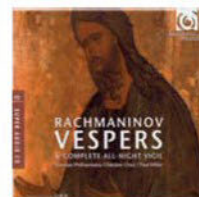
a smooth choral sound with the richness and depth one expects from Russian choirs – and he understands profoundly the work's structure at all levels.

BEST NON-RUSSIAN CHOICE

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir / Hillier

Harmonia Mundi © HMU80 7504

In this superbly judged interpretation the Estonians concede nothing to their Russian counterparts, though the physical sound is very different. Hillier creates an audible bond with this outstanding choir and displays his own deep insights into the score.



concerned with making the work an effective concert suite than underlining its liturgical origins. The renowned operatic mezzo Olga Borodina is the noteworthy soloist in 'Blagoslovi, dushe moy'a' ('Praise the Lord, Oh My Soul').

The 1995 recording by the Swedish Radio Choir under **Tõnu Kaljuste**, although quintessentially un-Russian, convinces with its precision of tuning and pacing in a way that the recordings by **David Hill** and **William Hall** do not: it's the artistic vision of a conductor born in Soviet Estonia and thoroughly familiar with the music, working with singers from a very different tradition and – faster speeds notwithstanding – making a more than convincing case for it.

The last recording of the 1990s, by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, under **Stephen Cleobury**, was rather different, being the first ever to feature an entirely male choir, with the exception of alto Margaret Cameron's lovely solo for 'Blagoslovi, dushe moy'a'. It is, of course, unutterably English, but the sheer effectiveness of the performance is testimony to the universal quality of Rachmaninov's music. It is beautifully paced, a miracle of choral blend (do the boys ever breathe?), with tuning that is as superb as one would expect from King's and the recording itself outstanding. I'd like a slower 'Nyne otpushchayeshi', but everything else is sublime.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The number of recordings in the new millennium increased exponentially, as did the range of countries from which they came. The first of the new century came from the National Academic Choir of Ukraine 'Dumka' under **Yevhen Savchuk**. Simultaneously lush and very precise, this is undoubtedly a superb recording in many ways, but the brilliance of its sound may be attributable to the fact that it seems to have been recorded consistently a semitone above written pitch. The recording by **Eric-Olof Söderström** and the Finnish National Opera Chorus of the following year is uncompetitive largely on account of surprisingly bad tuning, but there are two strong renditions by German choirs, by the Bavarian Radio Chorus under **Michael Gläser** and the SWR Vocal Ensemble, Stuttgart, under **Marcus Creed**, from 2002 and 2004 respectively. Gläser is quite daring with speeds, some sections seeming unusually fast and others, such as 'Bogoroditse devo' and 'Dnes' spasiye' ('The Day of Salvation'), as slow as some of the larger Russian choirs would take them. 'Nyne otpushchayeshi' is unfortunately compromised by its rapidity and by the tenor soloist's bizarre pronunciation of the Slavonic. Creed's



Hillier: 'at home with the Russian choral tradition'

version is overall more consistent, but also takes the 'Nyne otpushchayeshi' too fast for comfort. His bass section is more resonant than Gläser's, which makes a big difference to the overall sound, but there is a certain 'correctness' about the performance that does the work a disservice.

Tenebrae's live recording with **Nigel Short** also dates from 2004, and similarly suffers from a lack of flexibility, even

a perfunctoriness – surprising in an ensemble so used to performing Renaissance music. The Baroque resonances of 'Vzbrannoy voyevode' ('Champion General'), on the other hand, are picked up on in no uncertain terms. The two other recordings from the same year also do not rise above the crowd: the sound of the Budapest Tomkins Vocal Ensemble under **János Dobra** is somewhat thin for this kind of writing, and speeds are generally on the fast side; and **Dale Warland's** singers sound too frequently uncomfortable with the idiom, in addition to which there is a certain tendency to mannerism, effects such as exaggerated *staccatos* and accented chords, that seem unnaturally imposed upon the choir's smooth sound.

No such problems affect the 2005 recording by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir under **Paul Hillier**. Here we have a choir perfectly at home with the Russian choral tradition, its Slavonic pronunciation impeccable. This is beautifully blended, though with a brighter, cleaner sound than that of most Russian recordings: the 'Khvalite imya Gospodne' ('Praise Be the Name of the Lord') is the perfect illustration of this, the shining filigree melodic lines threading through the underlying choral cushion in a way unequalled by any other recording. But the powerful low basses that are so essential to

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

| DATE / ARTISTS | RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE) |
|--|--|
| 1965 State Academic Ch USSR / Sveshnikov | Melodiya (F) MELCD100 1365 (6/74*) |
| 1978 Svetoslav Obretenov Bulgarian A Cappella Ch / Robev | Capriccio (S) (3) C7010 (4/87*); 3/96*) |
| 1985/86 Choral Arts Soc of Washington / Rostropovich | Apex (S) 2564 67658-5 (1/89*) |
| 1986 USSR Ministry of Culture Chbr Ch / Polyansky | Alto (S) ALC1315 |
| 1989 Robert Shaw Fest Sgrs / Shaw | Telarc (F) CD80172 (10/90) |
| 1990 Corydon Sgrs / Best | Hyperion (F) CDA66460 (7/91); (M) CDA30016 |
| 1991 Voronezh Chbr Ch / Shepel | Globe (F) GLO5077 |
| 1992 St Petersburg Cappella / Chernushenko | Chant du Monde (F) LDC288 050 (5/93) |
| 1993 Philharmonia Chor / Hill | Nimbus (F) NI5432 (12/95) |
| 1993 St Petersburg Chbr Ch / Korniev | Philips (S) (2) 475 2272PM2 (11/94*); Decca (M) 478 7892DH; Pentatone (F) (S) PTC5186 027 |
| 1995 William Hall Master Chorale / Hall | Klavier (M) (D) KCD11065 |
| 1995 Swedish Rad Ch / Kaljuste | Virgin (F) 545124-2 (9/95*) |
| 1998 Ch of King's Coll, Cambridge / Cleobury | Warner (S) (5) 409408-2 (4/99*) |
| 2000 Nat Academic Ch of Ukraine 'Dumka' / Savchuk | Brilliant (B) 9100; (S) (5) 9233 (8/01*) |
| 2001 Finnish Nat Op Chor / E-O Söderström | Naxos (B) 8 555908 (12/04) |
| 2002 Bavarian Rad Chor / Gläser | Oehms (M) OC351 |
| 2002 Moscow Academy of Choral Art / Popov | Delos (F) DE3388 |
| 2004 SWR Voc Ens, Stuttgart / Creed | Hänssler Classic (F) CD93 112 |
| 2004 Budapest Tomkins Voc Ens / Dobra | Hungaroton (M) (D) HCD32307 |
| 2004 Tenebrae / Short | Signum (F) SIGCD054 (9/05) |
| 2004 Dale Warland Sgrs / Warland | reZound (M) (D) RZCD5011 |
| 2005 Estonian Philh Chbr Ch / Hillier | Harmonia Mundi (F) (S) HMU80 7504; (S) (3) HMX290 8385/7 (9/05*) |
| 2008 St Thomas Ch of Men & Boys, New York / Scott | Resonus (F) RES10169 (9/16) |
| 2011 Latvian Rad Ch / Kļava | Online (F) (S) ODE1206-5 (2/13) |
| 2012 Netherlands Rad Ch / Putniņš | BIS (F) (S) BIS2039 (7/14) |
| 2014 Phoenix Chorale, Kansas City Chorale / Bruffy | Chandos (F) (S) CHSA5148 (5/15) |
| 2014 London Sym Chor / Halsey | LSO Live (M) (S) LSO0781 (9/16) |

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'Outstanding': Kļava and his Latvian Radio Choir combine tradition with an unusually bright sound

the music's colour are also very much present. Hillier's speeds are also very carefully chosen, and his use of *ritardando* and *accelerando* very well judged so as never to be exaggerated or merely a superficial effect. The recording by the Moscow Academy of Choral Art under **Victor Popov**, issued two years later, though it was actually made in 2002, is impressive in many ways. The black-hued bass section is particularly noteworthy, but too often compromised by punched-out rhythms at the expense of line. The first and final sections, 'Priidite, poklonimsya' ('Come, Let Us Worship') and 'Vzbrannoy voyevode' respectively, illustrate this problem particularly well.

RECENT RECORDINGS

The second decade of the 21st century has already produced a fine crop of recordings, none of them so far from Russia – as sure an indication of the establishment of the *Vigil* as part of the international choral repertoire as one could wish for. Two of the many outstanding conductors originating from Latvia, **Sigvards Kļava** and **Kaspars Putniņš**, have turned their hand to the work, the former at the helm of the Latvian Radio Choir, the latter with the Netherlands Radio Choir. Kļava's 'Blagoslovi, dushe moya' is possibly the slowest I have ever heard, but it works sublimely well, and he takes similar calculated risks with 'Blagosloven yesi, Gospodi' and 'Velichit dusha moya Gospoda' (*Magnificat*). The

Latvians are superb at maintaining the tension, and the final 'Vzbrannoy voyevode' triumphantly shows the other side of the coin – light, rhythmical, almost dancing. The Dutch choir does not quite match the Latvians' effortless command of the idiom, and they are generally more successful in the faster sections. One bonus of this recording is that it also includes a fine reading of Rachmaninov's early setting of *V molitvakh neusypayushchuyu Bogoroditsu*.

Charles Bruffy's 2014 reading, at the helm of the Phoenix Chorale and the Kansas City Chorale, is remarkable in many ways. He is even more daring than Kļava in the slowness of his speeds, but the result is hugely impressive – listen to the utter shining stillness of the word *svet* ('light') at the pivotal point of the 'Nyne otpushchayeshi', for example; and 'Velichit dusha moya Gospoda' lasts more than 10 minutes (compare Kļava at 7'20"). In his *Gramophone* review, Malcolm Riley described the interpretation as 'chromium-plated', and it is hard to disagree with this. The London Symphony Chorus under **Simon Halsey** (the first of two recordings to have appeared this year) cannot quite compete with this luxurious sound palette, it being a live recording made at the Barbican in London, but it is a finely judged performance nevertheless. Finally, from the Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys in New York, under the much-missed **John Scott**, comes a recording (made in

2008) that is quite unlike any other. Its nearest relative is, of course, that by King's College, Cambridge, from 1998, but the results are very different, largely because the American choir's trebles have a rounder sound, less bright than those of King's, and the countertenors are generally more prominent. Scott's speeds are extremely well chosen, too; he is not afraid to employ slow tempos (though nothing like as slow as Bruffy), but also knows when to pull out the stops, as he does in the magnificent 'Khvalite imya Gospodne' and elsewhere.

THE VERDICT

There will be those who cannot bear the idea of this work being performed by any but a Russian choir, and the choice is correspondingly large. Sveshnikov's 1965 reading, while eccentric, is essential, and not purely for historical reasons, though these, too, are important. The sheer brashness of its engagement with the work is something that nobody else has captured, and probably should not attempt to: this is a recording that should be in every collection. Of the later Russian recordings, my preference would, without question, be for Polyansky. The sheer beauty of the perfectly balanced choral sound is one reason, but just as important is his understanding of both the shape of the work as a whole and each separate component of it.

Of non-Russian recordings, Bruffy's version, superb though it is, is probably a little bit too eccentric in terms of speed to be a final choice, which leaves the Estonians under Hillier and the Latvians under Kļava. Both are absolutely outstanding, combining a profound knowledge of the Russian choral tradition with a sound that is brighter than the traditional Russian choir (though absolutely not lacking in depth), and superbly paced. By a very small margin, Kļava emerges ahead: the Latvians have a very slight edge in their seamless blend. If one could have only two recordings of the *Vigil*, then Polyansky and Kļava would be the two I would recommend. And Kļava is certainly the recording I would return to most often. **G**

OVERALL TOP CHOICE

Latvian Radio Choir / Kļava

Online ODE1206-5

Ravishing, perfectly paced and in crystal-clear sound, this combines knowledge of Russian



sacred music with the Latvians' subtlety and power. Kļava is unafraid of slow speeds, but the pacing comes from his deep understanding of the score.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas

The Nutcracker, December 8

Given the speed at which tickets disappear for the Royal Ballet's annual production of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*, this live cinema broadcast is a particularly welcome addition to our December events and is made even more celebratory for its marking of the 90th birthday of its choreographer and director, Peter Wright. Boris Gruzin conducts the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, with a cast including Francesca Hayward as Clara, Lauren Cuthbertson as the Sugar Plum Fairy, and Federico Bonelli as the Prince.

roh.org.uk/cinema

The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester & BBC Radio 3

Bruckner, Berg and Barenboim Jnr, December 10

Violinist Michael Barenboim makes his Manchester debut in Berg's Violin Concerto in a performance being recorded for broadcast at a later date on BBC Radio 3. Juanjo Mena

conducts the BBC Philharmonic, and the other work on the programme is one of Mena's favourites, Bruckner's Symphony No 7. There's also a free pre-concert talk.

bridgewater-hall.co.uk, bbc.co.uk/events/edjn3d, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Met: Live in HD broadcasts the company premiere of *L'Amour de Loin*, December 10

Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho's landmark opera *L'Amour de Loin*, based on the medieval troubadour Jaufré Rudel and his idealised love for Clémence of Tripoli, comes to The Met.

This is not only a new production, from Robert Lepage, but it will also be conducted by Saariaho's compatriot Susanna Mälkki, making her own Met debut.

metopera.org/Season/In-Cinemas/

Philharmonie, Berlin & online

Late Night Concert with Simon Rattle and Barbara Hannigan, December 10

Fresh from her *Gramophone* Award triumph

with Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you*, Barbara Hannigan joins Simon Rattle and members of the Berlin Philharmonic for this intimate late-night performance of Gérard Grisey's song cycle and last composition, the *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil*. A work which bids farewell to the world, each of the cycle's four songs deals in its own way with crossing the threshold to death. The songs are introduced by a shadowy prelude, and linked by three intermezzi.

digitalconcerthall.com

Wigmore Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

Emmanuel Pahud performs CPE Bach, December 12

Last month we gave the Berlin Phil's principal flute Emmanuel Pahud a glowing review for his new Warner Classics disc of CPE Bach flute concertos with Trevor Pinnock and the Kammerakademie Potsdam. There's some CPE Bach in this Radio 3 lunchtime concert too, but it's very different, because this programme sees Pahud alone onstage to explore the solo

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

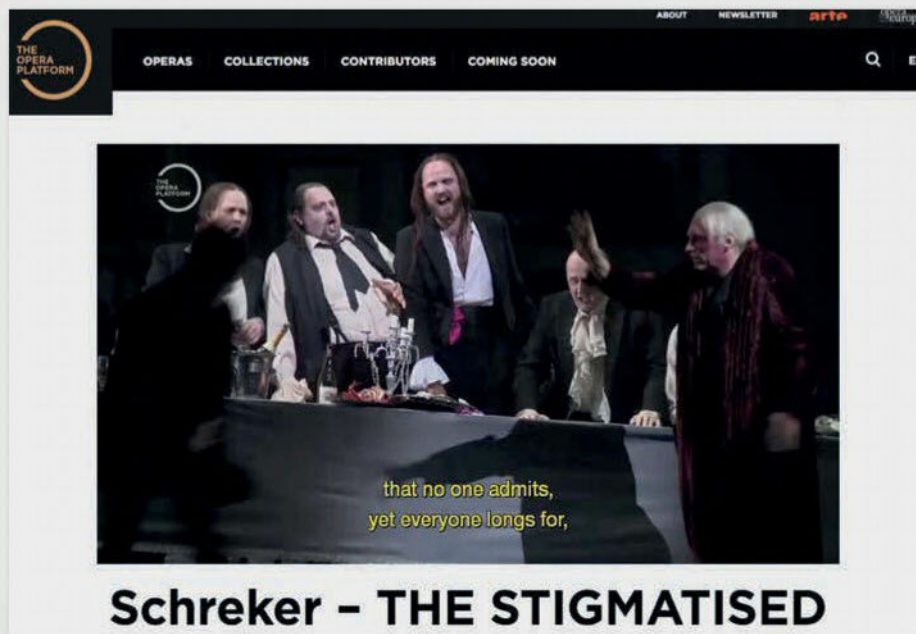
Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten* ('The Stigmatised') receives a striking production from Opéra de Lyon

Schreker

Franz Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten* has one of the most disquieting openings in opera. As we hear it in David Bösch's modern-dress production from the Opéra de Lyon, we glide gently across the water, courtesy of a video projection, to arrive at the mysterious island on which the action unfolds – where the deformed Alviano has created an aestheticist Utopia that has been secretly turned into a den of debauchery by the charismatic but evil Count Tamare.

The island itself is shown as a dark wasteland, its inhabitants clinging onto the last vestiges of civilisation. The climactic carnival scene has just the right sort of trippy, nightmarish quality to match the over-ripe, sweet-sour character of Schreker's score.

The slippery arioso the composer favours in his vocal writing is arguably unmemorable, and the Lyon cast can't disguise how taxing it is. But it's a uniquely haunting work and the orchestral playing here glistens and quivers seductively under Alejo Pérez.



Charles Workman's Alviano is a sympathetic creation, too, while Simon Neal is outstanding as Tamara. Magdalena Anna Hofmann's grungy Carlotta – the focus of the work's twisted love triangle – is

tirelessly sung. It's not easy viewing, but persevere and you'll find it stays with you long afterwards. **Hugo Shirley**
Available to view for free until April 6, 2017
[at theoperaplatform.eu](http://theoperaplatform.eu)

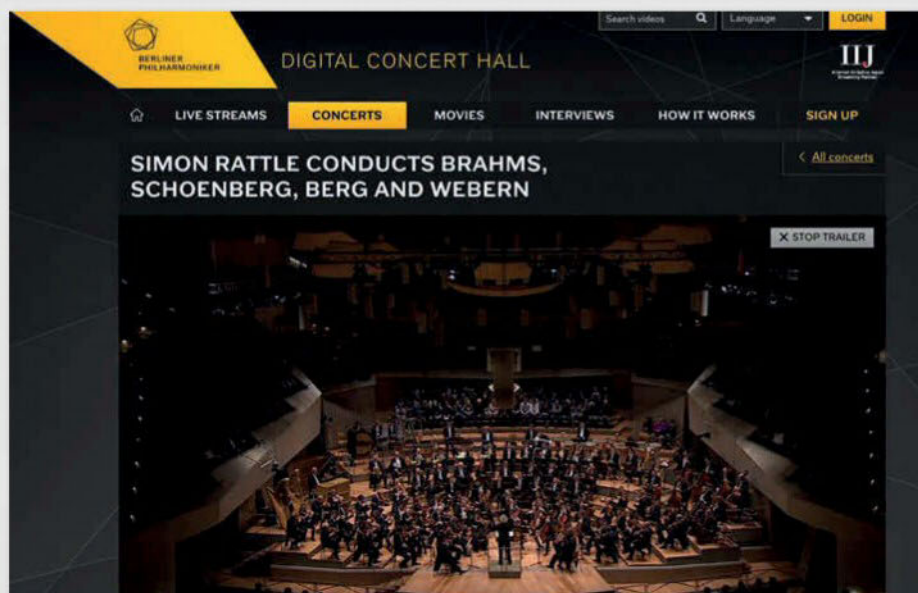
ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic put Brahms alongside music of the Second Viennese School

Brahms the Progressive

Mahler's Eleventh Symphony? It's a useful exaggeration employed by Simon Rattle when encouraging the audience in the Philharmonie to treat the orchestral pieces of the Second Viennese School as a single sequence. It's not that the knife-edge drama of Schoenberg's 'Peripetie' (from the Op 16 *Orchestral Pieces*), the black pathos of Webern's funeral march (*Six Pieces*, Op 6) or the grim echoes of waltz-time in Berg's 'Reigen' (from his Op 6 *Pieces*) are blunted or blurred. Instead, the Expressionist points of upheaval and eruption take their place in a longer story, one which has no happy ending but an abundance of indecently lush and explicit detail. And how contrasted are the three personalities in sound: Schoenberg extrovert and thorough to the point of didactic in exploring orchestral colour; Webern the confident, exacting tone-poet; Berg the compulsive creature of the stage.

Brahms's Second Symphony is treated to a high-pressure reading cut from the same cloth. Though the concert took place before Rattle's final US tour as the orchestra's chief conductor, every



pause and surge is already bedded in from years of working on this music together. Those who thought they knew Rattle's Brahms from the EMI/Warner Classics set will hear how it has evolved into a new animal, preternaturally alert to every harmonic shift. The slow movement is almost unnervingly played

in a single breath, well worthy of comparison with Rattle's illustrious forebears in Berlin.

Peter Quantrill

Available via various subscription packages to the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

flute repertoire. A celebration of the golden age of flute playing, his programme mixes music associated with the royal courts of 18th-century Germany with works such as CPE Bach's Flute Sonata in A minor, Wq132, but also adds pieces like Luciana Berio's *Sequenza I* for solo flute and Debussy's *Syrinx*, inspired by the great 20th-century French school of performers.

wigmore-hall.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Barbican, London & Live on 'BBC Radio 3 in Concert'**Gerald Finley sings Saariaho's True Fire, December 15**

More Saariaho, this time a UK premiere. Saariaho's *True Fire* is a shimmering orchestral setting of poetry by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Seamus Heaney, and was both composed for and dedicated to the baritone Gerald Finley. The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra's 30-year-old Chief Conductor-elect Santtu-Matias Rouvali guest-conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the rest of the concert is a Russian affair, opening with Tchaikovsky's Fantasy Overture *Romeo and Juliet*, and closing with Prokofiev's Symphony No 5.

barbican.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/events/emcj5v, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall Street, New York & online**Handel's Messiah, December 15 & 18**

Julian Wachner conducts the period-instrument Trinity Baroque Orchestra and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street in a pair of performances of Handel's *Messiah* that have become a mainstay of New York's holiday music calendar. They will have just returned from touring the oratorio to California, and on December 19 they bring it to the Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. Trinity Wall Street played a key role in bringing performances of the oratorio to the New World, presenting the second American performance in 1770, and indirectly playing a part in the American premiere eight months earlier, which took place just blocks away on Broadway at Burns's Coffee House, the concert serving as a fundraiser for Trinity's former organist. Both performances (December 15 at 7.30pm and 18 at 3pm) will be live-streamed.

trinitywallstreet.org

Barbican, London & BBC Radio 3**A musical evening with David Sedaris, December 20**

Perhaps a bit of a wildcard offering, but this one has comic potential written all over it, all wrapped up in music. This is a one-off evening

of music and words in which the enormously funny American comedian and author David Sedaris teams up with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the conductor Giancarlo Guerrero. Repertoire is unconfirmed as we go to press, but the fact that it's titled 'Death knows no season' should give you an idea of what to expect. This is being recorded for later broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

barbican.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/events/eb85v2, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide**James Levine conducts Nabucco with Plácido Domingo, January 7**

The first time Verdi's *Nabucco* will have been seen Live in HD, this revival of Elijah Moshinsky's production sees the Met's music director emeritus James Levine reunite with tenor-turned-baritone Plácido Domingo. Also appearing in this production are Liudmyla Monastyrskaya who previously sang Abigaille opposite Domingo in London, Dmitry Belosselskiy as Zaccaria, reprising the role with which he made his Met debut in 2011, Russell Thomas in the role of Ismaele and Jamie Barton as Fenena.

metopera.org/Season/In-Cinemas/

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THIS MONTH an all-in-one streaming system from a top British name, some exotic French headphones and how the hi-fi landscape is changing
Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

DECEMBER TEST DISCS



This recording of Manfred Honeck's suite from Strauss's *Elektra* is a true demonstration-quality set, well up to the Reference label's usual standards.



A familiar work in a scintillating recording, this performance of Fauré's Requiem by New York's Saint Thomas Choir is a superb Resonus release.

Reinventing an innovative range

Naim's New Uniti range is this month's major launch but there's plenty more, from Bluetooth speakers to more new turntables



Naim says it's escaping from the 'features race' with its New Uniti models, which are much more than a complete update of its innovate network music player line-up. You can read more about the technology behind the new products, and the reasons behind this radical move, in the Audio Essay on page 138, but the range itself comprises four models: the £1650 Uniti Core ripper/server, plus the £1600 Atom, £2999 Star and £3800 Nova systems **1**.

All are built on the company's new 'platform for the future', which is a combination of hardware and software more than three years and £4m in the making. They come with some striking features, not least of which are their 5" colour LCD display, a radio frequency remote handset with visual feedback from the system it's controlling, and the ability to rip CDs to external USB storage or, in the Star and Nova, SD memory cards.

The Uniti Star has a built-in CD ripping drive, while the Atom and Nova can accept an inexpensive USB CD/DVD drive and use that to rip discs. The Core, meanwhile, can accept a wide range of hard disks in its internal mounting cradle and can stream content to up to a dozen players simultaneously at up to 384kHz/32 bit. The players will all handle that resolution as well as DSD64 and 128, and have Apple AirPlay and Bluetooth aptX HD capability

along with UPnP streaming, internet radio, Spotify Connect and Tidal, plus Google Cast for Audio to allow other services to be added easily, including the Qobuz HD stream for subscribers. Production has now started in Naim's Salisbury factory, with the new models to arrive in the shops over the next few months.

Turntable specialist Pro-ject has added a new model to its entry-level offering with the appropriately named Primary **2**, merging the technologies of its skeletal Elemental and the popular Essential II. Belt-driven, the Primary uses the same motor and 8.5" arm with sapphire bearings as the Elemental, pre-fitted with and set up for the Ortofon OM5E cartridge. The £169 turntable has a conventional MDF plinth and platter, the material being chosen for its anti-resonant properties, and comes complete with a detachable dust-cover. There's a choice of black, red or white matte finishes, with a version with a built-in phono stage with line and USB outputs, the Primary Phono USB, available at £229.

Cambridge Audio has partnered with British textile manufacturer Marton Mills to create its Yoyo range of Bluetooth speakers **3**, wrapped in the weaver's signature fabrics in dark or light grey, blue or green. The fabric is 'thinned' by a unique process to make it acoustically transparent, and treated to make it

liquid- and dirt-resistant. Two models make up the initial range. The £150 Yoyo S is a compact speaker, yet fits in two full-range speakers, a subwoofer with passive bass radiator and high-quality amplification, all controlled by digital signal processing and powered by a rechargeable battery good for 14 hours between charges. Meanwhile, the £300 M comes as a stereo pair of speakers, each with one full-range driver and a subwoofer, and has a 24-hour battery. To come in January is the £350 L model, available only in the two shades of grey and with a full-range driver and subwoofer on each of its left, centre and right faces.

Bowers & Wilkins, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary, has launched its most ambitious headphones to date, the £700 P9 Signature **4**. Developed by the team behind the 800 D3 loudspeaker, the new model uses a semi-piston driver design similar to that used in speakers, and angles those drivers towards the user's ears for a more speaker-like effect. The earpieces are decoupled from the headband to avoid sound transmission between the channels, and the headphones are finished in Saffiano leather and supplied with a range of high-performance cables for use at home or on the move. A Lightning cable for use with iOS devices is under development and will be sent free to P9 Signature buyers when ready. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Musical Fidelity M6 Encore 225

This digital music system from the well-known British manufacturer may be simple but what it lacks in frills it makes up for in performance



MUSICAL FIDELITY M6 ENCORE 225

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musicalfidelity.com

The age of computer-stored music and streaming services is now firmly with us, to the extent that the old 'end of the CD' stories are swirling around again, as they do from time to time. However true those predictions may prove to be, one thing is certain: many with extensive CD collections will want to find a way to store them for instant access, whether for reasons of downsizing or just for sheer convenience.

It's hardly surprising that there's a boom in the hardware available to access computer-stored music, from simple 'black boxes' controlled via an app on smartphone or tablet, which you can plug between a home network and your hi-fi, all the way up to high-end network music players and DACs with network capability. However, what if the idea of

organising a music library on a computer device is too much hassle? That's where devices such as the Musical Fidelity M6 Encore 225 comes in: this £3999 unit, not much bigger than a conventional hi-fi amplifier, is a complete 'just add speakers' hi-fi system, based around the 'ripping' and storage of music.

In fact, it's one of two Encore models from the Wembley-based company. This one has high-quality amplification built-in but there's also a less expensive M6 Encore Connect version, at £3299, without amps and designed to be plugged into an existing amplifier or used straight into a power amplifier or active loudspeakers. The idea here is pretty simple: the Encore will either play CDs or rip them to an internal hard drive so you can summon them up and play them;

and, while it has been designed with audio performance very firmly in mind – the amplification here is derived from the company's excellent M6si integrated amplifier – simplicity of operation is also very much at the forefront of this unit's ethos. Yes, there is flexibility built-in here, in that the internal hard drive can easily be swapped out for a larger one if required. A one-terabyte (1TB) 2.5" drive is fitted as standard but, thanks to a simple slide-out tray in the rear panel, it would be easy to upgrade this to a larger drive or even a faster solid-state drive (SSD). As an example, a 2TB drive will set you back around £100 and a 4TB drive around twice as much.

However, the principal point here is ease of use. With the Encore 225 connected to a home network for online look-up of

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SAMSUNG GALAXY TAB S2

The control app for the Encore 225 works really well on Android tablets, so this classy Samsung Galaxy device would be an excellent choice.



metadata, you just 'post' a disc into the slot-loading mechanism below the bright, clear colour display and it's automatically copied to the hard drive, tags looked up and stored ready for use. It's not the fastest ripping process in the world, agreed, but the reason is that the Musical Fidelity is taking its time in order to ensure that the rip it makes is as accurate as possible. If you have a large CD library it will take some time to get it all stored on to the unit; but, of course, once done it's just a matter of adding new titles incrementally as you buy them.

As an alternative, an existing computer stored library can be copied over to the hard drive via a simple Google Chrome-based browser interface: you just log into the Encore on a computer on the same network and you can then 'drag and drop' files or folders across. With my extensive NAS-stored library I followed this routine and found it simple to load a decent range of recordings on to the Musical Fidelity.

Operation is via the simple front-panel navigation buttons or the remote control, using the colour display (which also shows cover artwork), or you can 'drive' the Encore 225 using that browser interface or a dedicated free Encore app. The app is currently available for Android smartphones and tablets but an Apple iOS version is 'in the works' – or, more correctly, at the time of writing it was in the Apple approval process.

The Encore is also designed to update itself via its network link, with Musical Fidelity promising that this will be used to add more features to complement its current music playback and internet radio. Completing the package is a range of digital and analogue inputs for external sources, while the USB sockets provided will also soon be activated for playback from portable devices and USB storage media.

PERFORMANCE

Beside some rival systems, the Encore 225 is very simple – at least as it currently stands – but the performance on offer more than compensates. With a mixed programme of content loaded, ranging from solo instrumental performances

all the way up to orchestral and choral works, it was able to show just what it can do with its rich, full and highly detailed sound, able to maximise musical involvement without ever sounding at all brash or too 'hi-fi'. In fact, whether you listen to music stored on the internal hard disk or summon up one of the excellent classical music streams available via TuneIn internet radio, the generous, clean sound of the Musical Fidelity, allied to more than enough power to both drive and control even ambitious speaker choices, make it a fine alternative to a complex system of boxes and cables.

There's an almost velvety smoothness about the presentation, imbuing anything it plays with a real sense of warmth and scale

It's no secret that Musical Fidelity founder Antony Michaelson is a firm devotee of classical music, both as a listener and a performer, so it should come as no surprise that the Encore 225 is particularly adept when it comes to making real instruments sound real – a welcome trait when so many modern systems seem to go for maximum impact at any cost. There's an almost velvety smoothness about the presentation here, imbuing anything it plays with a real sense of warmth and scale, but at the same time the system does a fine job with the ambience and atmosphere of a live concert-hall recording. It also has a beautifully natural way with the tonality of instruments and voices, making it one of those systems that is very easy to listen to and yet highly rewarding when it comes to the nuances of a recording.

Factor in the relatively compact size – despite the imposing looks, it stands just 12.5cm tall and fits in a normal hi-fi footprint – and the efforts made to ensure it's easy to use (even down to 'how to' videos on the Musical Fidelity website), and you have an unashamedly upmarket audio system that's a pleasure to set up and operate. As a bonus, it even works well as an amplifier for external sources. **G**

Or you could try...

As mentioned in the introduction to the review, the Encore 225 is hardly the first system of its kind but it has features still relatively rare in the all-in-one network streaming system market.

Cocktail Audio/Novafidelity X30

An obvious rival for much less cash is the Cocktail



Audio/Novafidelity X30, which has all the features of the Musical Fidelity plus greater streaming flexibility. It hasn't quite got the air of luxury surrounding the Encore 225, but then it starts from around £800 with a 2TB internal hard drive. Or if you want even better sound and have an existing amplifier, the X40 version is from £1249 without a hard-drive fitted, so you can choose your own. Details from novafidelity.co.uk.

Arcam's Solo Music system

Arcam's latest Solo Music system may not



have built-in ripping and storage but it can play music from your existing collection on computer or NAS drive, and also has CD/SACD playback as well as aptX Bluetooth for wireless connection of portable devices. It sells for £1299 – see arcam.co.uk for more information.

Naim Uniti Star

However, the Musical Fidelity's strongest challenge is



likely to come from Naim's new Uniti Star, which is due on sale at the beginning of 2017. Boasting wide-ranging compatibility with a range of music formats and services – see this month's Audio Essay – and a built-in ripping drive able to save music to connected USB and SD card media, this cornerstone of the company's new Uniti range looks like it could prove very popular. It will sell for £2999, or £3150 with a DAB radio module fitted. See naimaudio.com.

● REVIEW FOCAL ELEAR

A top-of-the-range treat for your ears

This unashamedly upmarket headphone design may not be Focal's most expensive model but it delivers an extremely convincing musical performance

With getting on for 40 years of history in loudspeaker manufacturing, the French company Focal may be best known for models from its Chorus and Aria ranges, all the way up to the massive Grande Utopia EM, but of late it's been making inroads into the headphone market. Its initial offerings combined a very Focal combination of solid engineering, innovation and a little quirkiness – as in the striking Sphear in-ear model – but above all they sounded very good indeed.

Now comes the new line-up of Focal headphones, and they're aimed very high indeed, with two of the models slotting in above the Spirit range. The entry-level model of this new range is the prosaically named Listen, which sells at £150 and is described as a 'premium mobile'

They live up to their open-back design by being both free-breathing and able to deliver fine presence

design. At the opposite end of the trio is the Utopia, named for Focal's flagship speaker range and with drivers using the same beryllium material found in those speakers' tweeters. Light and very stiff, beryllium is able to deliver a fast, detailed sound, which is why Focal has made it a speciality, despite the problems involved in forming it into speaker (or headphone) diaphragms. The striking-looking Utopia headphones sell for £3250 but, if that isn't exotic enough for you, there's a limited edition model made with Paris jeweller Tournaire. With just eight pairs made, finished in 18ct gold and with 6.5 carats of diamonds, it sells for €100,000 for the headphones alone, or €110,000 with its matching stand.

Fortunately, the Elear model we have here, while sharing much of the design of the Utopia, is rather more affordable at £800. In place of beryllium it uses an aluminium/magnesium dome driver in a unique 'M' profile designed for minimal distortion, thus allowing the headphones to be designed with a single 4cm driver with no need for any crossover or passive filtering yet still deliver a smooth frequency response from 5Hz to 23kHz.

FOCAL ELEAR

Type Open-back headphones

Price £800

Drive units 40mm aluminium/magnesium, full range

Frequency response 5Hz-23kHz

Sensitivity 104dB/1mW/1kHz

Impedance 80 ohms

Accessories supplied 4m cable, fitted case
focal.com

The Elear ear-cushions are covered with microfibre for comfort in place of the sheepskin of the Utopia. They still use that memory foam for a close fit, while the headband on which the earpieces are suspended is made from aluminium, not the carbon fibre of the flagship model. However, retained is the clever pivot system, which is built into the headband rather than being just above the earpiece mounts yet offers a good fit for heads of many sizes – or, as Focal puts it, 'full compatibility to any morphology'!

This is an open-backed design, so perhaps not one for use in noisy places, but the configuration should give the sound an open, airy feel, free from the compression effects or feeling of being shut in that some closed-back designs can engender. Connecting the headphones to the amplifier is a 4m balanced cable with a 6.3mm plug at the amp end and separate locking 3.5mm mono plugs for each earpiece, making it easy to change cables if required.

PERFORMANCE

When I first heard about these Focal headphones, I did wonder whether there was an error in the information, and they were actually called 'Clear': while the 'Elear' spelling turned out to be correct, I remembered that thought when listening, such is the clarity and precision of the sound they deliver. They have the wide-open, vibrant sound that's so enjoyable in the Spirit Pro headphones but with a warmer, richer bass to underpin all the information being presented.

As a result, they're a little more forgiving than the 'warts and all' pro headphones for less than perfect recordings, and manage to present music in a manner that's extremely lucid, natural in scale and, above

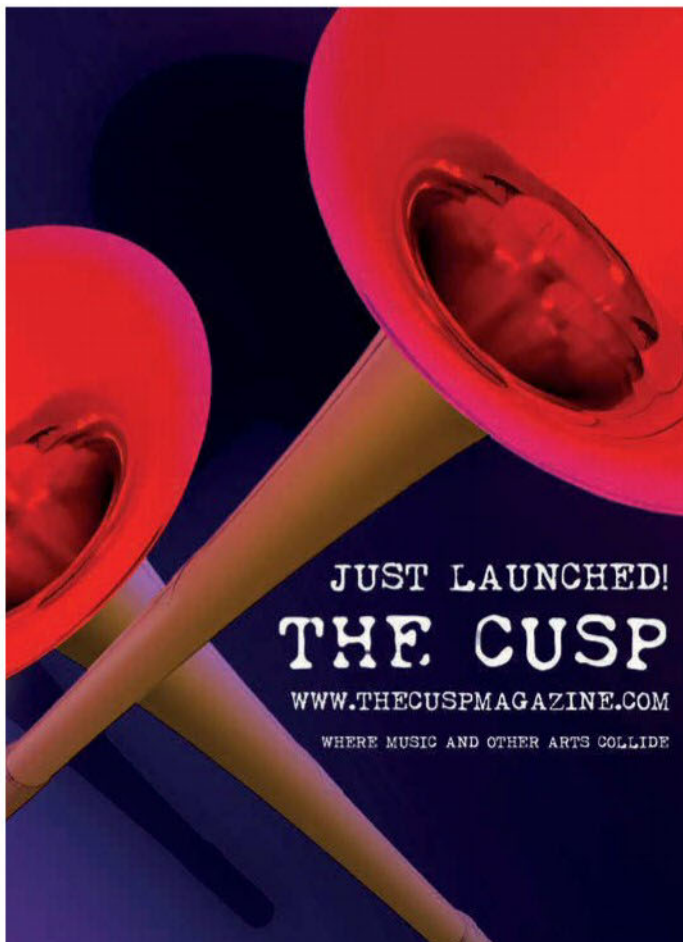


all, real-sounding. Voices and instruments shine through, there's an excellent 'listen in' quality, whether with small chamber ensembles or larger works, and the headphones live up to their open-back design by being both free-breathing and able to deliver fine presence.

They're exciting, too, with easy-going efficiency and impedance characteristics ensuring fine dynamics even when they're used with a relatively modest hi-fi amplifier. I tried them with everything from the Naim Supernait 2 through to the headphone stages of some very expensive DACs, and in each case found myself no longer listening to the Focals but rather enjoying the music. Which, of course, is exactly as it should be.

What's more, though the Elears aren't the lightest headphones on the market, weighing in at 450g (a smidge under a pound), they prove supremely comfortable in use. They feel solid and durable, and are easy to adjust to get a comfortable fit, while the earpieces remain cool over protracted use and that open-backed design seems to let the music flow more effectively.

As I said at the top of this review, these are hardly the least expensive headphones on the market, and there's no shortage of choice at this price level. But if you're serious about headphone listening, they should be well up your auditioning list. **G**



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● ESSAY

‘Making it sound good is (almost) the easy bit’

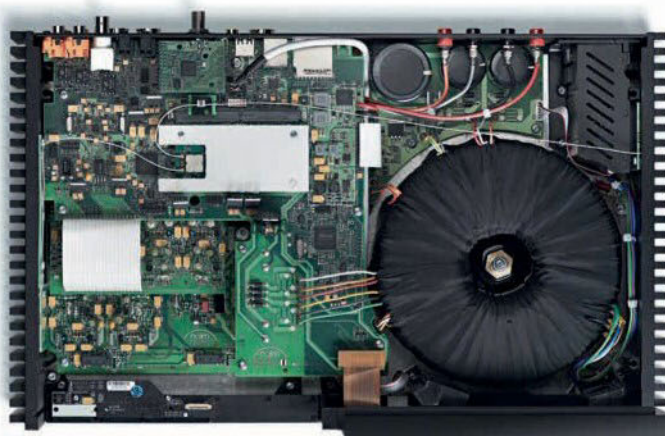
The sheer amount of work involved in bringing Naim’s New Uniti range to market shows just how much the landscape is changing in the audio world

As I observed in last month’s Essay, once almost anyone could build hi-fi equipment.

An amplifier required little more than a ‘recipe’ for a circuit, many of which could be found in electronics hobbyist magazines. Do the soldering, add a case, switches and knobs from a component supplier’s catalogue, and you were in business – quite literally so, in the case of some companies. Even the arrival of CD didn’t prove too much of a stumbling block, thanks to the availability of mechanism kits able to be connected straight to a digital-to-analogue converter. No wonder more than one manufacturer has said to me in the past that ‘the really expensive bit is the casework’.

However, the audio landscape is not just changing but is seemingly built on shifting sand, so that it now seems that making a piece of hi-fi is (almost) the easy bit. Now a manufacturer has to worry not just about the way the product looks but also all the electronics and software required upstream of the parts that actually make the noise. This was brought home to me when I visited Naim Audio down in Southampton a month or two back for a preview of the company’s new Uniti range (see page 133). Having more or less invented the all-in-one network music system market some seven years ago, the company had already refreshed most of the models in the range along the way, but was seeing many other manufacturers getting into the territory and challenging the original NaimUniti and the models it spawned. Even though Naim says the line has sales of over 35,000 units since 2009, has generated over £30m of revenue and has brought over 20,000 new customers to the range, the increased competition wasn’t the problem: changing technology was.

The situation is created by the ever-growing number of streaming music services out there, from Spotify to Tidal and from Deezer to Qobuz – and lots more, with new ones seemingly popping up almost every day. Back at the time when the NaimUniti first appeared, in May 2009, it was enough to offer playback



What lies inside: Naim’s new Uniti range has been radically rethought

from local network music sources, such as computers and NAS drives. Now Naim – like many other manufacturers – is racing to keep up with the demand from its customers for compatibility with greater numbers of services.

Naim MD Trevor Wilson describes this as a ‘feature race’, and it’s one from which the company was keen to break free. It’s clear to see why: although the company has added services over the years, including Spotify Connect and Tidal, the response from the more vociferous customers on its online forum has often been along the lines of ‘Well, that’s all well and good, but when are you going to support...?’

The Naim approach has been to take the challenge and turn it on its head by starting from scratch

The ‘feature race’, it seems, is one nobody can ever win, however much effort is put into it. The trouble, of course, is that we are all used to adding apps or programs to our computers, phones and tablets when we want them to do something new, and for some that means the logic is that ‘this product is really just a computer able to play music; how hard can it be to add new services?’

So the Naim approach has been to take the challenge and turn it on its head, not by tweaking the existing models but by starting from scratch with a new platform on which to build New Uniti – and future products. It’s a bold move, and

an expensive one: the project has been in progress for over three years, over which the software development team has expanded from seven members to 25 people at its peak. It has also involved a multimillion pound investment to bring to market not just the huge amount of code required to make all this work but also the hardware on and in which that software runs, from advanced high-speed computer processors under the lid through to the new-look casework,

complete with new large, bright colour displays. Even the remote control is new, operating on radio transmission rather than the infrared of the old models, and the control app for use on tablets and smartphones has also been rewritten not just to take advantage of the added flexibility here but also to reflect the look of the new products.

Wilson describes the result as ‘a platform for our future’, making this a much more significant move for Naim than just the launch of a bunch of new products. As well as now handling file formats up to 384kHz/24 bit and DSD64/128, the new models can support Google Cast for Audio, Apple Airplay, Tidal, Spotify Connect, Bluetooth (aptX HD), internet radio and UPnP hi-res streaming, with Naim saying that the Roon service, about which I have written several times recently, is in line to be activated.

Google Cast? Isn’t that just that little puck-shaped audio player you can buy at almost pocket-money prices? Not quite: both Wilson and Naim Audio’s Electronic Design Director Steve Sells are keen to point out that Google Cast for Audio enables a whole range of music services, including the likes of Qobuz hi-res streaming, and of course even more can be added as and when they become available. Wilson adds that there’s already a huge range of Google Cast-enabled services available online, and more are being added almost daily.

That’s the new audio world, and it’s clear that more audio companies are going to have to bite the bullet – and open the wallet – if change isn’t to leave them behind. **G**

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Missing 'snowflakes'

In his review of Mravinsky conducting Sibelius's Third (November, page 99), Rob Cowan remarks on a curious anomaly at the beginning of the finale, where violins should 'fall from the woodwind phrases like snowflakes', pointing out that 'they are entirely missing'. Precisely the same thing happens in Anthony Collins's classic recording. This suggests that the conductors were perhaps working from inaccurate scores. It certainly sounds odd.

John Greening
Peterborough

Mozart marathon

In his review of Mozart's complete works (October, page 90), David Threasher says: 'It'll take you 100 days to listen to the whole set if you play the 200 discs back to back.' Curious as to how long a non-stop Mozart Marathon would actually take, I crunched the numbers. Assuming each disc is 80 minutes, running this Amadeus gauntlet would take up 266 hours of your life. If your true love gave you 'Mozart 225' on the first day of Christmas, and you began round-the-clock listening, taking no breaks for sleeping nor for leaving the house to go tobogganing or clog-dancing, you would deplete the Mozart around the 12th day. Of course, by then you might well have perished from Mozart overdose. But I can think of worse ways to go!

David English
Somerville, MA, USA

Agile Carreras

I greatly enjoyed Richard Fairman's 'Icons' article on José Carreras (Awards, page 78). I just want to take issue with his comment that the voice was 'not agile enough for Rossini'. His *Otello*, and particularly his splendid early recording of the role of Giocondo in *La Pietra del paragone* ought to be remembered. And let's not forget his memorable contributions to the early Verdi series on Philips: *Un giorno di regno*, *I due Foscari*, *La battaglia di Legnano*, *Stiffelio* (not just *Il corsaro*); none of these are likely to be equalled in the foreseeable future.

John Plant, via email

Hunting for recordings

The Editor's suggestion to Christopher Mankiewicz (Letters, October, page 128)

Letter of the Month



Conductor Sir Neville Marriner: generous to the end and a man of warmth and affection

Remembering Sir Neville's generosity

In late November 2015, Sir Neville Marriner travelled to Taiwan for two concerts. After them, he kindly granted me his time for an interview in the bus back to the airport. In those two hours, he generously shared his memories about his early collaborations with Thurston Dart (including some withdrawn recordings with him playing on authentic bows), Christopher Hogwood (he did see Hogwood's ambitions very early on, and they parted on friendly terms after Hogwood got Sir Neville's consent to use the word 'Academy' in the orchestra he was to assemble), and his days learning conducting from Pierre Monteux in the US (with David Zinman and André Previn as his classmates).

Among all the anecdotes, stories and thoughts he spoke of, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields was the core. When asked what a good conductor's qualities were, he said the primary task was to assist the musicians and help them to achieve the best performance they could give. It is a conductor's duty to lead an orchestra to grow, he said, yet it must be done with great communication.

At customs, among all the hustle and bustle around him, Sir Neville got ready to take his flight to Tokyo, smiling sweetly at passers-by. Time seemed to slow down around him.

Wei-Chin Chen
Taipei, Taiwan

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to search online for deleted recordings raises an interesting point in how collectors operate. For many of us, the 'thrill of the chase' is as integral to the listening experience as the music itself.

Before the internet made this more straightforward, I remember spending hours tracing a Philips CD of Pinchas

Zukerman playing the orchestrated version of the Mendelssohn Octet that had become deleted. The feeling of satisfaction I felt as I popped the long-desired disc into the player made its contents sound so much sweeter!

Robert Roy
Edinburgh



The winner takes it all: a delighted Carolynn Crabb

Editorial note

We'd like to offer our congratulations to the winner of a recent *Gramophone* competition. In our August issue, we offered readers the chance to win their

own instrument, courtesy of Kawai and Jaques Samuel Pianos. The winner of the K200 upright, pictured here receiving it from Kawai's Matthew Ash, is Carolynn Crabb, who said: 'I was delighted to win the competition. It was perfect timing because I'm considering retiring next year so it looks like I will finally have time to start piano lessons!'

Correction: In our Instrumental reviews (Awards, page 80), we included the wrong titling for violinist Simon Smith's recording on Resonus (RES10167); it features excerpts of *Signs, Games and Messages* by Kurtág, not Kodály.

OBITUARIES

A great pianist and conductor, and one of music's great benefactors

ZOLTÁN KOCSIS

Pianist, conductor and composer

Born May 30, 1952

Died November 6, 2016



Zoltán Kocsis has died in Budapest, the city of his birth, aged 64. He started playing the piano aged five studying then at the Béla Bartók Conservatory and later at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music where he worked with Pál Kadosa, Ferenc Rados and György Kurtág. Among the awards he won were the Hungarian Radio Beethoven Competition (1970), the Liszt Prize (1973) and the Kossuth Prize (1978).

As a pianist he recorded primarily for Philips and Hungaroton. His Philips recording of Debussy's *Images* won him a *Gramophone* Award in 1990. Writing about the disc, James Methuen-Campbell commented that the 'terrific refinement of Kocsis's pianism is matched by a compellingly vivid piano sound from Philips and the end result provided me with some of the most exotic and colouristically evocative piano-playing I have heard for a long time'. For Philips he recorded the complete piano works of Bartók as well as Rachmaninov's piano concertos. In 2013 he won the Chamber Award for a Hungaroton recording of Bartók's violin sonatas with Barnabás Kelemen which Rob Cowan described as adding 'extra quotas of fire, intensity and a clinching sense of being rooted in the right soil, something that no other recordings achieve to quite the same degree' (5/13).

Kocsis co-founded the Budapest Festival Orchestra with Iván Fischer in

1983, initially for festival performances, but in 1992 it became a full-time ensemble, quickly achieving renown as one of the world's great orchestras. In 1997 Kocsis took over another Budapest-based orchestra, the Hungarian National Philharmonic, and quickly raised its standard. They recorded together regularly, working on Hungaroton's Bartók New Series to deliver a series of magnificent and critically acclaimed discs (the coupling of *Kossuth* and *The Wooden Prince* was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award in 2007), and also making recordings for BMC.

SIR RALPH KOHN

Pharmacologist, businessman and baritone

Born December 9, 1927

Died November 11, 2016



Sir Ralph Kohn, who has died at 88, fled with his family from his native Leipzig as a child, settling first in Amsterdam (where he started his musical studies) and then in the UK, attending Manchester University where he received a PhD for studies in pharmacology. He made his fortune in the pharmacology industry, set up a foundation and became a generous musical benefactor, supporting the Wigmore Hall's Song Competition, the Royal Academy of Music's Bach Prize and cantata series, and the Monteverdi Choir's Bach Cantata Pilgrimage. As a baritone he made many recordings, often with Graham Johnson at the piano.

Sir Ralph was the subject of 'My Music' in *Gramophone*'s January 2014 issue.

NEXT MONTH JANUARY 2017



Toasting the intensely talented Toscanini

As we anticipate the 150th anniversary of Toscanini's birth, Richard Osborne celebrates the conductor's legacy and assesses his contribution to broadcasts and recording

The countertenor of today, Iestyn Davies

From starring alongside Mark Rylance in 'Farinelli and the King' to recording a new Bach disc, Iestyn Davies is clearly getting it right, says Lindsay Kemp

Exploring Biber's 'Mystery' Sonatas

Fabrice Fitch tracks down the best available recordings of these remarkable violin works

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Bach, JS Cantatas Nos 12, 106, 131 & 150. *Vox Luminis/Meunier.* ⑆ **ALPHA258**

Telemann Théâtre musical. *Ens Masques/Fortin.* ⑆ **ALPHA256**
Telemann Wks for Rec. *Antonini/Giardino Armonico.* ⑆ **ALPHA245; ② ② ① ALPHA254**

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Mozart Mass, K427. *Sols incl Samson/Bach Collegium Japan/Suzuki.* ⑆ ③ **BIS2171**

Various Cpsrs Echoes - Wks for Vn & Pf. *Urioste/Brown, M.* ⑆ **BIS2284**

Various Cpsrs Femina moderna. *Allmännsången/Goundorina.* ⑆ ③ **BIS2224**

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Various Cpsrs 20th-Century Italian Pf Wks. *Various artists.* ⑤ (20 discs) **9470**

Various Cpsrs Picc Concs. *Mazzanti/Visintini/Haydn Orch of Bolzano & Trento/Angius.* ⑤ **95436**

Various Cpsrs Wks for Vn & Va. *Alogna/Alejo/Camerata de Coahuila/Shade.* ⑤ ② **95241**

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Holbrook Vn Conc. Orch Wks. *Ingolfsson/Brandenburg St Orch, Frankfurt (Oder)/Griffiths.* ⑆ **CP0777 636-2**

Homilius. Rolle. Stölzel Christmas Cantatas. *Sols/Cologne Acad/Willens.* ⑆ **CP0555 052-2**

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Nicolai Heimkehr des Verbannten. *Sols/Robert Schumann Philh/Beermann.* ⑆ ② **CP0777 654-2**

Praetorius. Siefert Cpte Org Wks. *Flamme.* ⑆ ② ③ **CP0777 959-2**

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FABULA

Bach, JS Pf Conc, BWV1052 *Berlioz Sym fantastique* (r1957/58). *Gould/Concertgebouw Orch/New York PO/Mitropoulos.* ② ② **FAB2250**

Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 8, 14 & 23 (r1958). *Barenboim.* ② ② **FAB2241**

Chopin Pf Concs. Grande Polonaise brillante (r1947-53). *Rubinstein/Arrau.* ② ② **FAB2211**

Gershwin Orch Wks (r1942-44). *Wilde/Goodman/NBC SO/Toscanini.* ② ② **FAB2240**

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Various Cpsrs Pf Wks (pp1989). *Nikolaieva.* ⑆ **FHR46**

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Gombert Motets, Vol 2. *Beauty Farm.* ⑆ ② **FB1612457**

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Tchaikovsky Sym No 1. *Tempest. Orch of St Luke's/ Heras-Casado.* (F) **HMC90 2220**
Various Cpsrs New South American Discoveries. *Norwegian Rad Orch/Harth-Bedoya.* (F) **HMU90 7670**
Various Cpsrs Souvenir's d'Italie - Rec Concs & Sons. *Steger.* (F) **HMC90 2253**

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Bruch Vn Conc No 2. *Liebeck/BBC Scottish SO/Brabbins.* (F) **CDA68055**
Koželuch Pf Concs Nos 1, 5 & 6. *Shelley/London Mozart Plyrs.* (F) **CDA68154**

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Mendelssohn Org Wks. *Dahl.* (B) (2) **LWC1108**
Schumann Vn Sons. *Engegård/Mortensen.* (F) **LWC1110**
Various Cpsrs Formosa mea - Songs. *Wik/Lund/Radziej/Mohn/ Kjos.* (F) **LWC1109**
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Reich Different Trains. *WTC 9/11. Tana Qt.* (F) (2) **LPMD7878**
Silvestrov Orch Wks, Vol 2. *Jakovenko/Ural PO, Yekaterinburg/ Borejko.* (F) **MDC7836**
MELODIYA *melodysy*

Lokshin Sym No 5. *Cl Qnt. Pf Vars (1956-71). Moscow CO/ Barshai/Mozgovenko/Grinberg.* (F) **MELCD100 2446**
Taneyev Stg Trios. *Lubotsky/Erblich/Dowbusch-Lubotsky.* (F) **MELCD100 2456**
Various Cpsrs Pf Wks (pp1986). *Batagov.* (F) **MELCD100 2464**
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Cage. *Feldman* Radio Happenings. *Cage/Feldman.* (F) **DVD DVMODE289**

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Osborne Across Oceans. *Aperio.* (F) **MS1494**
Plog. *Reskin. Rokeach* Running at the Top of the World: New Wks for Tpt & Pf. *Futer/Nowicki.* (F) **MS1610**
Various Cpsrs Viva Italia: Sacred Wks in 17th-Century Rome. *Duke Vespers Ens/Schmidt.* (F) **MS1580**

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Cimarosa Ovs, Vol 5. *Czech Chbr PO, Pardubice/Gallois.* (M) **8 573568**
Daqun Chbr Wks, Vol 2. *Ens Les Amis Shanghai/Han Qt.* (M) **8 579011**

Donizetti Messa di Gloria *Mayr* Credo. *Sols/Conc de Bassus/ Hauk.* (M) **8 573605**
Garrido-Lecca Peruvian Ste. *Norwegian Rad Orch/Fort Worth SO/Harth-Bedoya.* (M) **8 573759**
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Meyerbeer Songs, Vol 2. *Rotem/Zak.* (M) **8 573696**
Paús Va Wks. *Gottlibovich/Catalan CO/Pamies.* (M) **8 573602**

Soler Kybd Sons Nos 63-66. *Khristenko.* (M) **8 573564**
Spohr Sym No 4. *Budapest SO/Walter, A.* (M) **8 555398**
Taneyev Cpte Stg Qts, Vol 5. *Carpe Diem Qt/Buswell.* (M) **8 573671**

Tishchenko Sym No 8. *St Petersburg St SO/Serov.* (M) **8 573343**
Various Cpsrs French Sax Qts. *Kenari Qt.* (M) **8 573549**
Various Cpsrs Pf Wks. *Rizikov.* (M) **8 573725**
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Tchaikovsky Ballet Stes Transcr for Pf Duo. *Kodama, M & M.* (F) (2) **PTC5186 579**
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Berlioz Sym fantastique. *RCO/Gatti.* (F) (2) **RCO16007**
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Reger Org Songs. *Org Wks. Langner/Böhme.* (F) **ROP6133**
Reger Wks for Men's Ch, Vol 1. *Ens Vocabella Limburg/Meister.* (F) **ROP6126**

Various Cpsrs Laudes organí - Org Wks. *Neumann, M.* (F) **ROP6132**
Various Cpsrs Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal. *Children's Ch of St Ursus Cath, Solothurn/Reize.* (F) **ROP6134**
ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA *rpo.co.uk*
Haydn Nelson Mass. *Paukenmesse. Sols/City of London Ch/ RPO/Davan Wetton.* (M) **RPOSP054**
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Field. *Hammond* Irish Pf Concs. *McHale/RTÉ Nat SO/Lewis, C.* (F) **CD150**
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Various Cpsrs Nativity Sequence. *St Salvador's Chapel Ch/ Wilkinson.* (F) **SAND0004**
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Mozart. *Nielsen* Fl Concs. *Bausor/Royal Northern Sinf/Martin.* (F) **SIGCD467**

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Beethoven Sym No 3. *Taschenphilh/Stangel.* (F) **ETP006**
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Stravinsky Cpte Ballet Wks for Orch & for Two Pfs. *Basel SO/ Davies, DR/Namekawa.* (F) (4) **SOB12**
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REVIEWS INDEX

A

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Adams | |
| Scheherazade.2 | 50 |
| Violin Concerto | 50 |
| Addinsell | |
| Warsaw Concerto | 58 |
| Anzi | |
| Voglio vivere così | 96 |
| Arnold | |
| Hobson's Choice – Suite (arr C Palmer) | 58 |


B



























| | |
|--|------------|
| Babajanian | |
| Piano Trio | 70 |
| Bach, JS | |
| Ach bleib bei uns, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV649 | 67 |
| Brandenburg Concertos – complete | 116 |
| Cantata No 147 – Jesu, joy of man's desiring | 67 |
| Cantatas – No 82, Ich habe genug; No 170, Vergnügte Ruh, beliebte Seelenlust | 90 |
| Four Orchestral Suites | 117 |
| In dulci jubilo, BWV729 | 67 |
| Kommst du nun, Jesu, vom Himmel herunter auf Erden, BWV650 | 67 |
| Mass in B minor | 117 |
| Meine Seele erhebt den Herren, BWV648 | 67 |
| Partita in C minor, BWV826 | 84 |
| Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830 | 82 |
| Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme, BWV645 | 67 |
| Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten, BWV647 | 67 |
| Wo soll ich fliehen hin, BWV646 | 67 |
| Badelt | |
| Pirates of the Caribbean – He's a Pirate (exc) | 58 |
| Baermann | |
| Quintet, Op 23 – Adagio (arr Robert Percival) | 79 |
| Balakirev | |
| Tamara | 65 |
| Bartók | |
| The Miraculous Mandarin, Sz73 – Suite | 50 |
| Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119 | 50 |
| Piano Concerto No 3, Sz119 | 67 |
| String Quartets – No 2; No 4 | 70 |
| Beethoven | |
| Complete Symphonies – BLU-RAY DVD | 51 |
| Violin Sonatas – complete | 70 |
| Piano Concerto No 1 | 116 |
| Piano Sonatas – No 22; No 23, 'Appassionata'; No 24; No 25; No 26, 'Les adieux'; No 27; No 28; No 29, 'Hammerklavier'; No 30; No 31; No 32 | 48 |
| String Quartets – complete | 117 |
| Symphonies – complete | 117 |
| Symphony No 7, Op 92 – Allegretto | 58 |
| Violini Concerto | 116 |
| Bellini | |
| I Capuleti e i Montecchi | 100 |
| Norma | 100 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Bennett, RR | |
| Autobiography | 53 |
| Down to the Sea in Ships | 53 |
| Four Preludes | 53 |
| Suite of Old American Dances | 53 |
| Symphonic Songs | 53 |
| Berio | |
| Frühe Lieder (orch Berio) | 53 |
| Sinfonia | 53 |
| Berlioz | |
| The Damnation of Faust | 116 |
| Harold in Italy | 116 |
| L'Enfance du Christ | 116 |
| Les Nuits d'été | 116 |
| Requiem | 116 |
| Roméo et Juliette | 116 |
| Symphonie fantastique | 116 |
| Bernstein, E | |
| The Magnificent Seven – Suite | 58 |
| Bixio | |
| Mariù | 96 |
| Parlami d'amore | 96 |
| Blackwood Jr, E | |
| Symphony No 1 | 116 |
| Bloch | |
| Schelomo | 116 |
| Bowden | |
| Sudden Light | 65 |
| Brahms | |
| Cello Sonatas – Nos 1 & 2 | 71 |
| Piano Quartets – Nos 1-3 | 117 |
| Piano Sonata No 3, Op 5 | 82 |
| Scherzo, Op 4 | 82 |
| Symphony No 1 | 117 |
| Symphony No 4 | 116 |
| Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op 9 | 82 |
| Vier ernste Gesänge, Op 121 | 71 |
| Brahms (arr Reger) | |
| Auf dem Kirchhofe, Op 105 No 4 | 95 |
| Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No 2 | 95 |
| Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer, Op 105 No 2 | 95 |
| In Waldeinsamkeit, Op 85 No 6 | 95 |
| Sapphische Ode, Op 94 No 4 | 95 |
| Wir wandelten, wir zwei, Op 96 No 2 | 95 |
| Braunfels | |
| Die Gott minnende Seele, Op 53 | 90 |
| Drei chinesische Gesänge, Op 19 | 90 |
| Romantische Gesänge, Op 58 | 90 |
| Der Tod der Kleopatra, Op 59 | 90 |
| Vier japanische Gesänge, Op 62 | 90 |
| Bruch | |
| Violin Concerto No 1 | 116 |
| Bruckner | |
| Intermezzo | 73 |
| String Quintet | 73 |
| Symphony No 2 (1877 version, ed Haas) | 54 |
| Symphony No 3 (1873 version, ed Nowak) | 54 |
| C | |
| Caldara | |
| Don Chisciotte in Corte della Duchessa – Introduzione; Addio, Signor Padrone; Giacche debe andar così; Penso di già che appena; Primieramente, Sancio; Quel cor, | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| che non vogli'o; Si l'abbiamo, Ricciardetto | 101 |
| Sancio Panza Governatore dell'isola Barattaria - A dispetto del vento, e dell'onda; Confida al vento la sua speranza; Per tanti obbligazioni Signor; Venga pure in campo armato | 101 |
| Cardillo | |
| Core 'ngrato | 96 |
| Castello | |
| Sonate concertate in stil moderno, libro primo | 54 |
| Chabrier | |
| L'étoile - O petite étoile! (Romance de l'étoile) | 107 |
| Charpentier | |
| Le mariage forcé - excerpts | 106 |
| Le Sicilien - excerpts | 106 |
| Chausson | |
| Poème | 116 |
| Symphony in B flat major | 116 |
| Chiaramello | |
| Fenesta ca lucive | 96 |
| Chopin | |
| Mazurkas, Op 41 | 84 |
| Piano Sonatas - Nos 1-3 | 82 |
| Clarke | |
| Piano Trio | 70 |
| Copland | |
| Appalachian Spring | 55 |
| Hear Ye! Hear Ye! | 55 |
| Corelli | |
| Concerto grosso, 'Christmas Concerto', Op 6 No 8 (arr Simon Wright) | 67 |
| Couperin, F | |
| L'apothéose de Lulli | 90 |
| Ariane consolée par Bacchus | 90 |
| Le Parnasse, ou L'apothéose de Corelli | 90 |
| Crescenzo | |
| Rondine al nido | 96 |
| Crusell | |
| Concert-Trio | 79 |
| Curtis, E | |
| Non ti scordar di me | 96 |
| Ti voglio tanto bene | 96 |
| Torna a Surriento | 96 |
| D | |
| d'Indy | |
| Symphonie sur un chant montagnard | 116 |
| Dalla | |
| Caruso | 96 |
| Debussy | |
| Images | 84 |
| Printemps | 116 |
| Dukas | |
| L'apprenti sorcier | 65 |
| Durufié | |
| Messe Cum jubilo (1967 version) | 91 |
| Quatre Motets sur des thèmes grégoriens | 91 |
| Requiem, Op 9 (1948 version) | 91 |
| Requiem, Op 9 (1961 version) | 91 |

| | | |
|--|---|-----|
| Dvořák | The Noonday Witch, Op 108 | 65 |
| | Slavonic Dances – Op 46; Op 72 | 55 |
| E | | |
| Eastman | | |
| Femenine | | 73 |
| Elgar | | |
| Introduction and Allegro | | 116 |
| The Dream of Gerontius | DVD | 91 |
| They are at rest | | 91 |
| F | | |
| Farrant | | |
| Call to Remembrance | | 91 |
| Fasch | | |
| Trumpet Concerto, FWV L:D1 | | 67 |
| Ferilli | | |
| Un amore così grande | | 96 |
| Franck | | |
| Symphonic Variations | | 116 |
| Froberger | | |
| 23 Suites for Harpsichord | | 83 |
| Lamentation | | 83 |
| Tombeau | | 83 |
| G | | |
| Gastaldon | | |
| Musica proibita | | 96 |
| Gesualdo | | |
| Terzo Libro di Madrigali | | 92 |
| Ghedini | | |
| Appunti per un Credo | | 56 |
| Musica notturna | | 56 |
| Sonata da concerto | | 56 |
| Studi per un affresco di battaglia | | 56 |
| Gillardino | | |
| Au pays parfumé | | 85 |
| Capriccio etneo | | 85 |
| Concertino di Hykkara | | 85 |
| Parthenicum | | 85 |
| Gilse | | |
| Eine Lebensmesse | | 92 |
| Ginastera | | |
| Danzas argentinas, Op 2 | | 56 |
| Guitar Sonata, Op 47 | | 56 |
| Harp Concerto, Op 25 | | 56 |
| Pampeana No 1, Op 16 | | 56 |
| Giordano | | |
| Andrea Chénier |  | 105 |
| Glass | | |
| Music in Contrary Motion | | 73 |
| Music in Fifths | | 73 |
| Music in Similar Motion | | 73 |
| Music With Changing Parts | | 73 |
| Two Pages | | 73 |
| Glière | | |
| Symphony No 3, 'Ilya Muromets' | | 117 |
| Gluck/Berlioz | | |
| Orphée et Eurydice – Amour, viens rendre à mon âme | | 107 |
| Gounod | | |
| Faust – Versez vos chagrins dans mon âme | | 107 |
| Roméo et Juliette – Depuis hier je cherche en vain mon maître...Que fais tu, blanche tourterelle | | 107 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Grieg (arr Reger) | |
| Eros, Op 70 No 1 | 95 |
| Ich liebe dich, Op 5 No 3 | 95 |
| H | |
| Hahn | |
| Mozart – Alors, adieu donc, mo amour, le destin nous sépare | 107 |
| Haleff, A | |
| Symphony No 2 | 116 |
| Handel | |
| Arianna in Creta – Bell'idol amato/ Deh, taci crudel | 103 |
| Atalanta – Caro/Cara, nel tuo bel volto | 103 |
| Partenope – Voglio amare infin ch'io moro | 103 |
| Apollo e Dafne – Felicissima quest'alma | 103 |
| Echeggiate, festeggiate numi eterni | 103 |
| Hercules – Where shall I fly? | 103 |
| Parnasso in festa – Dopo d'aver perduto il caro bene...Ho perso il caro ben; Già le furie vedo ancor | 103 |
| Semele – Overture; Come, Zephyrs, come; No, no, I'll take no less | 103 |
| Harris | |
| Bring us, O Lord God | 91 |
| Violin Concerto | 50 |
| Haydn | |
| Cello Concerto No 1 | 56 |
| Keyboard Concerto No 11 | 56 |
| Symphony No 6, 'Le matin' | 56 |
| Symphonies – No 100, 'Military'; No 45, 'Farewell' | 117 |
| Herrmann | |
| Vertigo – Suite | 58 |
| Honegger | |
| Symphonies – Nos 2 & 5 | 116 |
| Howard | |
| Magnetite | 65 |
| I | |
| Ives | |
| Three Outdoor Scenes – Hallowe'en | 65 |
| J | |
| Janson | |
| Nocturne |  96 |
| Joachim | |
| Romance, Op 2 No 1 | 79 |
| Jongen | |
| Passacaglie et gigue, Op 90 | 57 |
| Sonata eroica, Op 94 | 57 |
| Symphonie concertante, Op 81 | 57 |
| Juon | |
| Die drei Schwestern, Op 99 No 2 | 93 |
| Der einsame Pfeifer, Op 21 No 3 | 93 |
| Erinnerung, Op 13 No 2 | 93 |
| Jewish Folk Songs | 93 |
| Jugend, Op 13 No 3 | 93 |
| Klage der Gattin, Op 13 No 1 | 93 |
| Das Mädchen, Op 2 No 2 | 93 |
| Märchen, Op 21 No 2 | 93 |
| Paradies, Op 99 No 1 | 93 |
| Regen, Op 21 No 1 | 93 |
| Russian Folk Songs | 93 |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Ukrainian Folk Songs 93 | in braccio 107 | Reger | Symphony No 1 116 | Walton | |
| Das verlassene Mägdlein, Op 2 No 1 93 | Le nozze di Figaro – Non so più; Voi che sapete 107 | Flieder, Op 35 No 4 95 | Symphony No 4 65 | Cello Concerto 116 | |
| Wiegenlied, Op 13 No 4 93 | Lucio Silla – Pupille amate; Il tenero momento 107 | Fromm, Op 62 No 11 95 | Shostakovich | Weber | |
| K | Mass in C minor, K427  93 | Glückes genug, Op 37 No 3 95 | Complete String Quartets 78 | Oberon – Overture 65 | |
| Krogulski | Piano Concertos – No 17, K453; No 25, K503 60 | Mein Traum, Op 31 No 5 95 | Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti 96 | Weelkes | |
| Piano Octet, Op 6 74 | Quintet Fragment, K515c 75 | Wiegenlied, Op 43 No 5 95 | Sinopoli | When David heard 91 | |
| L | Requiem 117 | Reich | Lou Salomé – Symphonic Fragment 65 | Williams, J | |
| Lachenmann | Rondos – K269; K373 60 | Different Trains 77 | Pour un livre à Venise – Hommage à Costanzo Porta 65 | Schindler's List – Theme 58 | |
| Consolation II (Wessobrunner Gebet)  96 | String Quartets and Quintets – various 117 | WTC 9/11 77 | Tombeau d'Armor III 65 | Star Wars – Throne Room and Finale 58 | |
| Leoncavallo | String Quintets – No 5, K593 (two versions of finale); No 6, K614 75 | Reznicek | Stamitz, J | Williamson | |
| Mattinata 96 | Violin Concertos – No 1, K207; No 2, K211; No 3, K216; No 4, K218; No 5, K219 60 | Goldpirol 61 | Three Quartets 79 | Elegy – JFK 86 | |
| Pagliacci  105 | Mussorgsky | Nachstück 61 | Stanford | Epitaphs for Edith Sitwell 86 | |
| Liszt | Night on the Bare Mountain (arr Rimsky-Korsakov) 65 | Prelude and Fugue 61 | String Quartets – No 5, Op 104; No 8, Op 167 79 | Fantasy on 'This is my Father's World' 86 | |
| Orpheus, S98 65 | Musumarra | Wie Till Eulenspiegel lebte 61 | Strauss-Grünfeld | Little Carols of the Saints 86 | |
| Lully | Il canto 96 | Rossini | Soirée de Vienne 84 | Mass of a Medieval Saint 86 | |
| Les amants magnifiques – excerpts 106 | N | Adelaide di Borgogna – Salve, Italia...O sacra alla virtù...Soffri la tua sventura. Serti intrecciar le vergini...Questi che a me presenta...Vieni, tuo sposo e amante...Al trono tuo primiero 105 | Strauss, R | Peace Pieces 86 | |
| Le bourgeois gentilhomme – excerpts 106 | Neuwirth | Demetrio e Polibio – Pien di contento in seno 105 | Ein Heldenleben 65 | Résurgence du feu (Pâques 1959) 86 | |
| Monsieur de Pourceaugnac – excerpts 106 | Marsyas 84 | Eduardo e Cristina – Nel misero tuo stato...Ah! Chi sa dirmi se la sposa...La pietà che in sen serbate 105 | Don Quixote 116 | Wolf (arr Reger) | |
| Pastorale comique – excerpts 106 | Newman | Matilde di Shabran – Sazia tu fossi alfine...Ah, perché, perché la morte 105 | Stravinsky | Der Freund, HWW118 No 1 95 | |
| La princesse d'Elide – excerpts 106 | 20th Century Fox Fanfare 58 | Semiramide – Ecomi alfine in Babilonia...Ah, quel giorno ognor rammento 105 | The Firebird (1910 version) 50 | Italienisches Liederbuch, HWW159 – Sterb' ich so hülle in Blumen meine Glieder; Und willst du deinen Liebsten sterben sehen 95 | |
| Psyché – excerpts 106 | Nørgård | Tancredi – O sospirato lido...Dolci d'amor parole 105 | Jeu de cartes 116 | Das Ständchen, HWW118 No 4 95 | |
| M | Drommesange (Dream Songs). Singe die Gärten, mein Herz  96 | Rota | Three Movements from Petrushka 84 | X | |
| MacMillan | Norman | Parla più piano (Theme from 'The Godfather') 96 | T | Xenakis | |
| Symphony No 4 58 | James Bond – Main Theme 58 | Saariaho | Tausch | Nuits  96 | |
| Violin Concerto 58 | Nowakowski | Nuits, adieux  96 | XII Pièces en quatuor, Op 22 79 | Z | |
| Mahler | Piano Quintet, Op 17 74 | Überzeugung  96 | Tavener | Zemlinsky | |
| Symphonies – Nos 1, 2, 5, 7 & 10 (Adagio) 117 | O | Saint-Saëns | Song for Athene 91 | String Quintet 73 | |
| Martin | Offenbach | Danse macabre, Op 40 65 | Tchaikovsky | Collections | |
| Trio sur des mélodies populaires irlandaises 70 | Les contes d'Hoffmann – Vois sous l'archet frémissant 107 | Piano Quinet, Op 14 77 | Serenade 116 | Miki Aoki – 'Mélancolie' 84 | |
| Martinů | Fantasio – Voyez dans la nuit brune (Ballade à la lune) 107 | String Quartet No 1, Op 112 77 | String Quartets – No 1; No 3 79 | Alison Balsom – 'Jubilo' 67 | |
| Symphony No 6 116 | Onslow | Symphony No 3 116 | Symphony No 4  62 | Baryll Quartet – 'The Art of the Baryll Quartet' 117 | |
| Mascagni | String Quintets – No 20, Op 45; No 26, Op 67 75 | Sartori | The Nutcracker  62 | Boxwood & Brass – 'Music for a Prussian Salon' 79 | |
| Cavalleria rusticana  105 | P | Con te partirò Valente Passione 96 | Violin Concerto 116 | Choir of Clare College, Cambridge – 'Mater ora filium' 98 | |
| Massenet | Panufnik, R | Satie | Telemann | Cory Band – 'War Memorials' 65 | |
| Cendrillon – Allez, laissez moi...Coeur sans amour 107 | Four World Seasons  62 | Gymnopédies 84 | Jesus liegt in letzten Zügen (Der sterbende Jesus), TWV1:983  90 | Marianne Crebassa – 'Oh, Boy!' 107 | |
| Mendelssohn | Piston | Schoenberg | Die stille Nacht (Der am Ölberg zagende Jesus), TWV1:364  90 | Cyrrill Ibrahim – 'Dialogue' 84 | |
| Four Pieces, Op 81 – No 3, Capriccio; No 4, Fugue  74 | Symphony No 6 116 | Kol Nidre 96 | Thomas | Ben Johnson – 'Sonnets' 98 | |
| String Quartets – Nos 5 & 6  74 | Pleyel | Schubert | Psyché – Non, ne la suivons pas... Sommeil ami des dieux (Romance du sommeil) 107 | Vladimir Jurowski – 'Tribute to Evgeny Svetlanov'  67 | |
| Violin Concerto 116 | String Quartets – Op 41 No 1; Op 41 No 2; Op 42 No 2 77 | Four Impromptus, D899 85 | Tomkins | Jonas Kaufmann – 'Dolce vita' 96 | |
| Menotti | Poulenc | Moments musicaux, D780 85 | When David heard 91 | London Sinfonietta – 'Sinfonietta Shorts'  65 | |
| Violin Concerto 116 | Mélancolie 84 | Piano Sonata in A major, D664 84 | Torelli | Francesco da Milano – 'Sinfonietta Shorts' 65 | |
| Merritt | Soirées de Nazelles 84 | Piano Sonatas – No 16, D845; No 19, D958 85 | Suonata con stromenti e tromba, G1 67 | Montreal Symphony Orchestra – 'Dance macabre' 65 | |
| Il libro dell'amore 96 | Prokofiev | Six German Dances, D820 85 | V | Charles Munch – 'Charles Munch – The Complete RCA Album Collection' 116 | |
| Meyerbeer | Romeo and Juliet – Montagues and Capulets 50 | Schubert (arr Reger) | Various | The Norwegian Soloists' Choir – 'As Dreams'  96 | |
| Les Huguenots – Nobles Seigneurs, salut! 107 | Romeo and Juliet, Op 64 60 | An den Mond, D296 95 | Album des Six 84 | Ignacy Jan Paderewski – 'The American Recordings – The Complete Victor Recordings, 1914-31' 86 | |
| Milhaud | Seven, They Are Seven, Op 30  67 | Erlkönig, D328 95 | Verdi | Les Paladins – 'Molière à l'opéra' 106 | |
| Caramel mou 84 | Two Poems, Op 7  67 | Gesänge des Harfners, D478 Nos 1-3 95 | Otello  105 | Carolyn Sampson – 'A Verlaine Songbook'  98 | |
| Modugno | Violin Concerto No 2 116 | Prometheus, D674 95 | Vivaldi | Hermann Scherchen – 'The Art of Hermann Scherchen' 117 | |
| Volare 96 | R | Schubert-Liszt | Concertos – RV127; RV505; RV507; RV510; RV513; RV527; RV529 62 | Giuseppe Sinopoli – 'Giuseppe Sinopoli' 65 | |
| Molitor | Rachmaninov | Songs – various 84 | The Four Seasons, Op 8 Nos 1-4  62 | Veriko Tchumburidze – 'Music from the Motion Pictures' 58 | |
| The Singing Bridge  65 | The Bells  67 | Schumann | W | Capella de la Torre – 'Fire Music' 97 | |
| Monk | Humoresque, Op 10 No 5 84 | Allegro in B minor, Op 8 84 | Wagner | Voces8 – 'Winter' 99 | |
| Abide with me (arr Ross) 91 | Méloдие, Op 3 No 3 84 | Fantasie in C major, Op 17 84 | The Ring – An Orchestral Adventure (arr Henk de Vlieger) 63 | | |
| Morricone | Piano Concerto No 3 116 | Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102 78 | Rienzi – Overture 65 | | |
| Film music – various 58 | Ramsey | Märchenbilder, Op 113 78 | Die Walküre (Act 1) 106 | | |
| Mozart | How are the mighty fallen 91 | Piano Quintet, Op 44 78 | Die Walküre – Ride of the Valkyries 58 | | |
| Adagio, K261 60 | | | | | |
| Exsultate, jubilate, K165 (with two versions of opening aria)  93 | | | | | |
| La clemenza di Tito 105 | | | | | |
| La clemenza di Tito – Parto, parto 107 | | | | | |
| La finta giardiniera – Va' pure ad altri | | | | | |

Julia Donaldson

The celebrated author recalls a childhood filled with music and explains how a passion for song-writing led to children's books

My father was an amateur cellist, my mother sang alto with the Hampstead Choral Society, and together they pretty much ran the Hampstead Music Club. There were concerts at Burgh House with musicians like Janet Baker, and once a month anyone who wanted to play string quartets would gather at our house. My sister and I would stand outside the room with our trolley, laden with tea and cake, waiting for them to finish rehearsing so we could go in.

I was five when my parents first went to the summer school at Grittleton House, an extraordinary gothic folly in Wiltshire. The week would be filled with quartet coaching, orchestral rehearsals and concerts. My sister and I didn't make music at all when we were there, but we'd put on shows like 'Cinderella comes to Grittleton', and we'd enjoy exploring the house's secret passages and strange attics and cellars, even when we were teenagers. The conductor Leighton Lucas, who conducted the orchestra there, would buy us sweets, and we got to know the Hungarian violinist Anatole Melzak, whose diminutive wife – a professional pianist – taught me the piano.

When we were both at secondary school, my sister and I joined a children's opera group in Baker Street. When I say 'opera' group, it was more like a cross between opera and musicals, so we'd perform things like *Tom Sawyer* that were specifically written for children. As a result of all this, when I was 12 I got to understudy the fairies in a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Old Vic, with music by Thea Musgrave. It was such a huge experience – every night I'd go there on my own. I had to step in straight away because two of the fairies were ill and I remember having to wave my branch over Titania and it crossing with someone else's by mistake. By the end of the run, I knew that play off by heart.

Although I played piano and loved music – I even briefly played the violin until I dropped it and it broke – I much preferred acting. I went to Bristol University to study Drama and French and, for Rag Week, I went around the pubs singing songs from the shows with my friend Maureen, accompanied by another friend Colin Sell (of *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue* fame) on piano and his roommate Malcolm (now my husband) on guitar. In my second year, Maureen and I spent four months in Paris as part of our course, and we'd go to the Champs-Élysées and do a bit of busking. Malcolm then wrote to us saying he was going to join us and when he turned up our repertoire suddenly expanded. When we got back to England, Malcolm and I became an item. We'd do gigs together and I started writing my own songs.

After I left university, I sent a tape of my songs to the BBC TV programme *Play School*, and they started commissioning



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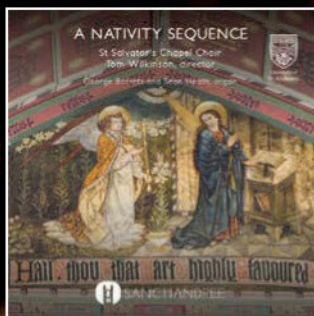
Dinu Lipatti *pf* (EMI/Warner Classics)

My piano teacher loved Lipatti's Chopin. At home, we had the 78s and we'd invite round the little girl from next door and choreograph her to the music.

me for *Play Away*. I'd come up with the lyrics and the melodies, Malcolm would work out the chords, and then I'd write it all out on manuscript paper and send it to them along with a homegrown recorded version. One of the songs I wrote was *A Squash and a Squeeze*. Years later, someone who had a cassette recording of it was working for a publisher and when they were casting around for storybook ideas for children they thought of me. Axel Scheffler provided the illustrations, and the book was published in 1993, with *The Gruffalo* following two years later. It couldn't have come at a better time as, by that stage, my song-writing had dried up a bit.

Malcolm and I will sometimes listen to classical music in the evening while we have a game of Scrabble or cribbage, but I tend to listen more to classical music when it's live – it's better when you can concentrate on it rather than having it on in the background. We have a good local classical music society which puts on concerts, and we recently heard the Schubert Ensemble playing the lovely Brahms F minor Quintet. We loved it at the concert so I went and bought their recording of it on CD. We listen to CDs in the car, and at home we've got loads of vinyl. I still listen to cassettes, too – I'm old-fashioned like that! **G**

'A Treasury of Songs' by Julia Donaldson, with illustrations by Axel Scheffler, is out now, published by Macmillan.



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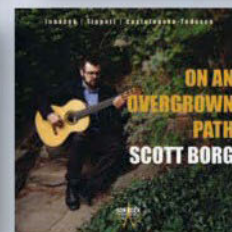
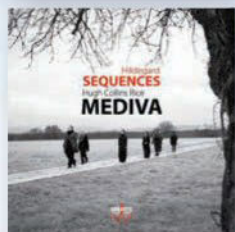
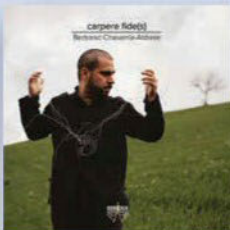
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